

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the central text.

# **Sleep On The Floor**

jupiter<sup>ss</sup>

## Sleep On The Floor by jupiterss

**Category:** IT (2017), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** Aged-Up Character(s), Alternate Universe - No IT (King), Drug Use, F/M, Fluff and Angst, M/M, Multi, POV Multiple, Punk Richie Tozier, Swearing, Underage Drinking, Underage Smoking, uhhhh they make out a lot

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Georgie Denbrough, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

**Relationships:** Beverly Marsh/Ben Hanscom (minor), Bill Denbrough/Beverly Marsh (minor), Bill Denbrough/Stamley Uris, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2017-10-12

**Updated:** 2017-11-06

**Packaged:** 2020-02-01 00:25:30

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Chapters:** 9

**Words:** 27,044

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Suddenly he saw his whole future split in two. One half where Richie drove away into the night, never to be seen again. He would go back to his house, his mother would scold him for being out at night without a jacket. He would go to sleep and wake up and Richie would be in some other town. And Eddie would see his friends every day until eventually they moved or drifted apart as friends often did. He would leave his mother's house in a few years and have a place of his own, and he may even fall in love with someone else, get married, live a good, content, happy little life. And there would be days when he thought about Richie and there would be days when he didn't. And there would be days when Richie was just a foggy memory, possibly a dream, a good dream, but with out any reason to believe it was real. And Richie would do much the same or maybe he would just drive until it killed him.

And then there was the other half.

The half that scared him nearly to death.

Every single atom in his body was telling him to stay where he was. Just stand there, just watch him drive away. Don't do anything stupid. Dear god, don't do anything stupid.

“The offer still stands, you know.”

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

The characters are intended to be 17/18 in this. Set in the early nineties.

I am really just making this up as I go along, anything could happen. Be aware that my stories are usually angsty and sad and really pretentious lmao.

Constructive criticism is appreciated! I haven't written anything for a few years so I'm still getting back into the swing of it! I know it's not perfect, so if you can help me out then that would be great!

Eddie Kaspbrak stood in front of his bathroom mirror, studying his reflection with a nervous and rather intense look plastered on his face. His hair was carefully parted and styled, not a single hair out of place.

He was wearing a light grey button-up shirt that had been pristinely ironed, sleeves rolled neatly to his elbows and the end tucked into black dress-pants, with a leather belt tying it all together. His shoes were polished to the point where you could see your reflection in them. You would think they were brand new if you saw them, he only ever wore them during special occasions, such as weddings or the sparse few times a year he went to church. There was an undone bow-tie hanging over the edge of the sink, and he had been debating with himself whether or not to wear it. He didn't want to look like he was trying too hard, and seeing as the rest of his attire had probably crossed that line already, he finally decided against it.

His watch beeped, snapping him out of a trance that he wasn't aware he was in. He looked down at his wrist and realised he had been standing in the bathroom, distracted by his own reflection, for over an hour. Lucky for him, he had decided to get ready two hours before he had to leave the house, and he still had about half an hour left to prepare.

He swung the mirror open revealing a meticulously organised cabinet, shelves stocked with an entire pharmacy's worth of pill

bottles, tubes, and boxes, all labelled with complicated medical jargon. Even Eddie wasn't entirely sure what some of them did, but he knew that he needed them, or at least would need them at some point. He grabbed a rectangular blue container from the lowest shelf. It had seven small compartments, each printed with a letter corresponding with a day of the week. S M T W T F S. Through the plastic you could see each compartment was filled with six or seven pills of varying shaped and colours. He flipped open the lid labelled with an 'F', for Friday, and threw them, two at a time, into his mouth. He dry-swallowed them all with ease.

He put the container back in it's rightful place on the shelf and shut the cabinet. He took a deep breath in, looking at his reflection with his chest puffed out and shoulders tall. He almost admired how he looked in this position, trying to re-imagining himself as taller, buffer, like some of the guys he saw in the locker rooms at school. But that admiration disappeared, as quickly as it arrived, as he exhaled and his shoulders dropped, back into a slight slouch. He huffed and shook his head a little, deciding that envying other men's body types wouldn't do him much good, and turned to the door, making sure to grab his inhaler from the side of the sink before he left the bathroom and shuffled down the hallway to his bedroom.

---

4.59 pm.

Eddie stood at his front door, his hand hovering over the doorknob, staring at his watch, counting the seconds down until it would read 5.00 pm, when he would leave his house and walk to Bill Denbrough's house, and he would get there by 5.10 pm, which gave him plenty of time to talk to Bill before 5.30 pm, when Bill's 'friend', who was a complete stranger to Eddie, would supposedly come and pick him up and take him on this 'date', that had been set up, much to Eddie's dismay.

Apparently, at some point during the last couple of months, the members of his friend group had decided that Eddie needed to loosen

up and meet new people. They had attempted to get him a date several times before, but Eddie had absolutely refused, freaked out, or cancelled, each time without fail. It took a hell of a lot of persuasion but they finally got him to agree to something, a movie date with one of Bill's old friends that he had never met before – as long as 1. someone else came with them and 2. this person wasn't too rowdy. Bill assured him that he had nothing to worry about.

So the plan was made that they would go to the Aladdin, and Eddie and this stranger would sit together, and Bill, Stan, and Beverly would sit two rows behind them. Eddie figured that he wouldn't have to talk to this person too much if they were in a cinema, as long as they had decent manners, and that he could lean back on the other's for support if he got too nervous. He also figured he could easily say he was going to the bathroom and leave if he needed too.

When he saw his watch flash 5.00pm, he opened the door and stepped out, shouting out a cheerful 'Goodbye!' to his mother, who he assumed had probably fallen asleep in front of the tv. Shutting the door behind him he set off, turning left on the footpath and heading towards Bill's house. He had known Bill since they were 7, and Eddie reckoned he could have navigated his way to Bill's house with his eyes closed (although he would never actually try).

He arrived exactly when he planned that he would, 5.10pm. His heart started racing faster as he walked up the driveway. He put his hand in his pocket and gripped his inhaler, not taking it out, but just reassuring himself that it was there. He knocked on the front door 3 times. It swung open within a few seconds, and Beverly *beamed* when she saw him.

“You look so good!” she exclaimed, and Eddie frowned, and dropped his gaze.

“Shut up,” he mumbled, pushing past her as she giggled. He made his way to the living room, where Bill and Stan were on the couch, Bill laying with his feet over Stan's lap. Their heads shot up as he entered the room with his arms crossed over his chest, Beverly in tow. Stan smiled almost as wide as Beverly did, and Bill wolf-whistled,

receiving a very annoyed look from Eddie.

"You clean up real nice," Stan said, pushing Bill's legs off of his lap and walking over. "He's gonna be blown away for sure!"

"Yeah, for sh-sure," Bill perked up, nodding his head enthusiastically.

"Whatever, I just want to get it over with." Eddie's face started to turn red, already regretting that he agreed to do this. He wasn't made for this kind of thing! He was too paranoid, too awkward. He always had been. There was a reason he had never been on an actual date before his friends started setting him up. He hadn't even kissed anyone, for gods sake. He just didn't have the charm that people who go on dates and have relationships seemed to have. All his friends had had boyfriends and girlfriends and made out with people at parties and been flirted with by kids at school, but he never had. Everyone just, overlooked him. And if he was honest with himself, he didn't really mind it. Being alone. It meant that he could focus on things that were more important.

They heard a vehicle with a very loud and assumably very old engine pull up at the front of the house. When the engine stopped, it was replaced by hard rock music, playing just as loud. Eddie's stomach dropped, and he prayed to god that it didn't belong to his date, that he would not have to get in whatever car sounded like *that*.

"No way, is R-richie actually early f-for once?" Bill jumped up and ran to the front door, and Stan followed.

Beverly looked over at Eddie, her smile quickly fading as she saw his face. He had gone white as a ghost, and she could see his hands visibly shaking.

"I'm gonna be sick," Eddie whispered, and sprinted around the corner to the bathroom. Beverly went after him, seeing him slam the bathroom door and lock it. She waited a moment, then gently knocked on the door.

"Hey, you okay?" she asked, genuinely worried. She knew he would be nervous, but not like this. He didn't reply, instead she heard the telltale hiss of his inhaler. "Just, stay there Eddie, I'll go talk to the

boys.” She heard a very faint “okay”, and headed back out to the front of the house where the others were having a cheerful reunion.

“Beverly Marsh, you fucking beautiful creature.”

Leaning up against a rusted, beaten, maroon coloured pick-up truck, and much taller and rougher than she remembered, was Richie Tozier, wearing ripped jeans, combat boots, white t-shirt, and a black denim jacket littered with patches that had been haphazardly sewn on. His hair was almost down to his shoulders, sticking out wildly in all directions. She might not have even recognised him if it weren't for the thick frame glasses, being held together by several pieces of tape, the lenses magnifying his eyes just as they always did.

“Richie,” she laughed, and ran towards him, enveloping him in a hug. He picked her up and swung her around with ease. “It's been far too long.” He really towered over her, she had to actually crane her neck to look at his face. Probably a whole head taller than Stan and Bill.

“Sure has gorgeous,” Richie replied, looking at her face with absolute awe. “so anyway, where's my future husband?” He winked at Bill, who looked back towards the house.

“Where'd he go, Bev?” he asked.

“He's, uh, having a panic attack in the bathroom.” Bev said, suddenly sounding quite serious. Richie looked concerned.

“Don't worry, he's just nervous, He'll calm down soon.” Stan reassured.

SHIT SHIT SHIT FUCK SHIT SHIT

Eddie was pacing back and forth in the bathroom, gripping his inhaler tightly in his hand, sure he would either break it or it would leave a bruise. His shirt had become untucked and his hair was messed up from him running his hands through it several times. He really didn't want to do this. He wanted to go home, have a shower,



go to bed, forget about this whole thing. Surely they would let him go home. They would have to, if they saw him like this.

He heard knocking on the door again.

“Hey Eddie, can you let me in?”

Beverly.

There was a moment of silence as he debated whether or not to answer.

“It's just me, the others are still out front.”

Eddie hesitated at the door, running his fingers over the lock. After about a minute he unlocked it, and opened the door to face Beverly, who looked relieved when she saw him, but still worried.

She stepped in and closed the door behind her, and then wrapped her arms around him. She leant her face into his hair.

“Sorry,” his voice was muffled against her shoulder.

“Don't be, it's alright. He'll understand if you don't want to go.”

Eddie's breathing settled down, as well as his heartbeat. He stepped away from Beverly, starting to feel a lot better.

“No, I-” he kicked himself for what he was saying. “I'll go. I promised I would.”

Beverly's face lit up. “Let's fix you up a bit first, though.” He nodded, and flashed her a small smile.

Beverly helped him get his hair looking neat again, and he fidgeted with his clothes in front of the mirror until he thought he looked presentable enough.

“All good?” she asked him before she opened the door. He took a deep breath and then nodded at her, and she turned and walked out into the hallway.

Eddie allowed himself one last glance in the mirror before he

followed her out.

Bill, Stan, and Richie were standing in the kitchen when Beverly emerged from the hallway.

“Just be nice,” she said quietly as she leaned against the bench next to Richie.

“No worries,” he replied with a smirk.

Eddie slowly stepped out of the hallway and into view, and stood with his arms folded, his eyes immediately locking onto Beverly, who nodded slightly at him, assuring him it was okay. He looked at Bill and Stan, both of whom still looked quite worried. He put off looking at the fourth person there for as long as he could. He could see through peripheral vision that they were wearing mostly black and that they probably hadn't had a haircut in years. When he did look up at Richie's face, he saw him staring, bewildered, with a crooked, goofy smile on his face. He was also 6 foot fucking tall. Eddie felt queasy in his stomach. Half of him wanted to run straight back into the bathroom and lock the door and never come out. The other half wanted to do that as well but was trying not to want that. Trying to be brave.

“Hi,” Richie finally perked up after a few long moments of silence. “Richie Tozier.” He took a step forward and reached his hand towards Eddie, who noticed that his fingernails had been coloured black, but not like his mother's nail polish. More like he had done it with a permanent marker.

Now that he was closer, the height difference between the two was much more amusing. Eddie was only five foot four. He barely came up to Richie's shoulders.

Eddie shook Richie's hand, feeling pretty intimidated by this person looming over him like a grungy skyscraper.

“Eddie,” he said, although it came out in more of a whisper. Richie

smirked at this.

“Eddie,” he repeated, to himself mostly, “it's cute.”

Eddie felt his face go hot, flustered, still staring at Richie with a kind of awe-struck horror.

The three in the kitchen noticed this and Bill decided to interrupt.

“W-we should leave or w-we'll miss the m-m-movie.”

Richie swung around. “Right you are, my man! Off we go!” He turned his head to Eddie and offered his arm. “M'lord?”

Eddie looked at his arm, up to his face, and then back at his arm, looking alarmed and confused. He hesitantly linked his arm through, and Richie beamed. They walked out the front to his truck, Bill, Stan, and Beverly in tow, and Richie opened the passenger side door, bowing exaggeratedly, motioning for Eddie to get in.

Eddie looked at the vehicle, disgusted. No way he was getting in that thing.

Richie stood up, obviously a little confused.

“You okay?” he asked. “Don't worry, I cleaned the inside of it, Bill said you don't like much mess so,”

“It's fine.” Eddie said, coming out more harshly than he intended. He took a deep breath, and got in. Richie carefully closed the door, smiling through the window. Eddie flashed him a smile back.

The other three piled into the back, basically having to sit on top of each other, and Richie walked around to the drivers side and got in.

Beverly leaned forward and put her hand on Eddie's shoulder, and he reached up and squeezed her hand for a second, the they both dropped their hands in their laps.

“Ready to go guys?” Richie asked enthusiastically. The three in the back replied with an excited 'yes!'. Richie turned to Eddie, who nodded at him, smiling properly for the first time. Richie's heart melted a little, then turned the keys in the ignition, the engine roaring to life, music blasting out the radio, and off they went down

the road.

## 2. Blind Date

### Summary for the Chapter:

just shoddy angst and fluff I guess? thsi will get more interesting next chapter I promise

Richie had insisted to pay for all the tickets when they got to the cinema, and was greeted with a halfhearted protest from everyone except Beverly, who smugly took up the offer. They were now all standing in front of the confectionary bar, deciding on which snacks to buy. Richie and Eddie were standing together, far enough away from the others that they could talk without them hearing, but close enough that Eddie still felt comfortable.

Richie had been staring at the selection in front of him for several minutes at this point, a concentrated look on his face, mulling over each option in his head carefully. Eddie had the same order since he was ten years old, a medium diet coke and a pack of MnM's, things he only got to indulge in on rare occasions as his mother would never allow those sorts of food at home, and the transaction was promptly fulfilled when they arrived. But Richie had yet to make any sort of decision, and it was really starting to annoy Eddie, who had already downed almost half of his drink.

“You're gonna miss the start of the movie if you don't hurry up,” Stan called out to them, starting to head towards the theatre with Bill and Beverly, all with armfuls of sugary food and drinks. Richie held a finger up to them, “Shush you, this is a very important decision and you are breaking my concentration.”

Eddie rolled his eyes and watched the three of them disappear around a corner. To his relief, Richie finally stepped towards the counter, asking the cashier for a “large popcorn and coke, if you would, my dear,” and whipped his head around to wink at Eddie, who was tapping his foot impatiently.

“Hope you like popcorn Eds.”

Eddie did not like popcorn, the butter made his hands and face feel

greasy and it always got stuck in his teeth, but he was glad that he had finally made a decision and they could go in and watch the movie, and not talk for an hour and a half, so he smiled politely and shrugged.

Eddie spotted the other three as they entered the theatre, sitting up in the back row on the balcony with their feet up on the chairs in front of them. He instinctively went to go join them, but Beverly shook her head at him, and he remembered that he was supposed to be on a date. Richie had already gone a few rows ahead and was shuffling past people to get to the middle of the row. Eddie followed him, apologising to the people he had to push past. Richie fell down into the chair, popcorn bucket in his lap, and patted the seat next to him. "Take a seat, love."

Eddie sat down in his assigned seat, clenching his hands together in his lap, sitting up as straight as he could, looking at the screen and pretending to be interested with what was playing. They had only missed about a minute and a half of the beginning of the film, and the opening credits were still rolling. His mind was completely occupied though. He could see Richie looking at him from the corner of his eye, and he was only glad that it was too dark to see that he was blushing real hard.

Halfway through and Eddie had not been able to focus on the movie at all. Too many thoughts were running in this head, and he kept glancing at Richie whenever he thought he wouldn't notice. Richie had been enjoying himself, laughing out loud at some of the jokes, and leaning forward in his seat during the more intense chase scenes. Though he was also thinking about Eddie, trying to plan out different moves he could make in his head. He had noticed him looking over every now and then, and had tried hard to pretend he hadn't noticed. He honestly kinda liked this kid, even if he was pretty skittish and hadn't really said much to him at all. Of course he was aware of this stuff before he met him, given a crash course by Bill over the phone,

the day before he arrived. He only wished Eddie started to open up a bit more, and not feel as nervous around him.

He noticed Eddie's hands weren't glued together anymore and were resting loosely on his lap, the now empty MnM packet was sitting on the arm of the seat, folded rather than crumpled up. Richie laughed quietly to himself. *God, even his rubbish was neat.*

He rested his elbow on the chair arm dividing Eddie's seat and his own. Then slowly moved his hand over, only a little at a time. And finally reached and took Eddie's hand gently. When Eddie didn't pull away, he started to intertwine their fingers, and held his hand properly, running his thumb over the other's. After a hesitant moment, Eddie did the same.

*Fucking hell, what am I doing?*

Eddie couldn't think of anything except the feeling of his hand entwined in Richie's. His hands felt so small compared to Richie's. His stomach felt like it was doing somersaults, and he could practically hear his own heartbeat pounding in his ears. His face was cold and burning at the same time. He was sure he looked like a tomato right now. Richie seemed so calm, like this was no big deal, while Eddie's whole body was freaking out. He had to stop himself reaching for his inhaler.

Yet, the rhythm of Richie's thumb running over his, eventually started to calm him down

They held hands for the rest of the movie, which he had completely given up on. He knew he wouldn't be able to recall a single part of it later.

They stood up as the end credits started to roll and the lights went up, and headed towards the exit. Bill, Bev, and Stan were waiting eagerly out the front, and they all had to do a double take when they saw the two boys walking out together, *holding hands, for gods sake. How in the world did Richie get Eddie to hold his hand?*

Eddie honestly had forgotten when they joined up with the group.

"So, you t-two are obviously getting along then," Bill asked with a cocky look on his face. Richie smiled down at Eddie, who looked sort of puzzled. He looked at their hands locked together and his eyes went wide, ripping his away quickly, and Richie's face changed to surprised, and maybe even a little hurt. Eddie suddenly felt really bad for doing it.

"Like the movie?" Stan cut in before things escalated past that point.

"Best I've seen in a while, actually," Richie chirped. And they all started discussing it, talking about their favourite scenes. Eddie stayed silent save the occasional laugh or exclamation in agreement.

They all stood outside on the footpath for twenty or so minutes, until Bill looked up and stated it was getting cold.

"Alright, well let's head on home," Beverly said. Richie reached into his pocket and grabbed his car keys, throwing them to Bill, who wasn't expecting it and almost dropped them.

"You guys can drive the truck home, I'm gonna walk back with Eds." Bill raised his eyebrows at him.

"You okay with th-that, Eddie?"

Eddie looked at him, then up at Richie, then closed his eyes for a moment. He exhaled sharply.

"Yeah, sounds fine." He forced a smile, and Richie looked down at him fondly, and a little shocked he actually agreed.

"Okay, see you guys tomorrow then!" Beverly called over her shoulder as the three of them made their way over to the truck, Bill swinging the keys around his finger.

"If anything happens to my baby, Denbrough, I'm breaking one of your legs!" Richie shouted as they climbed in. Bill waved out the window.

Richie and Eddie watched them drive out of sight, up the street and turning left at the intersection, and then started to walk in the same direction.



They walked in silence for five minutes. Richie kept opening his mouth to say something, but could think of nothing.

A breeze flew in, and Eddie wrapped his arms around himself. Goosebumps appeared on his arms. *Hypothermia. He is going to get hypothermia.*

Richie noticed Eddie shivering and stopped in his tracks.

"Fuck, you must be freezing," he slipped off his denim jacket and put it over Eddie's shoulders. "There."

"But you've only got a t-shirt on now, you'll be cold." He started to shrug the jacket off.

"No seriously, take it, I'm all good!"

Eddie looked at him for a while, studying him carefully. The jacket had made him look a lot better, so seeing his lanky, pale arms jutting out from the oversized t-shirt sleeves was a little surprising, and even made him look a bit less intimidating. Slowly, he slipped his arms into the jacket sleeves. It had been a few sizes too big on Richie, and Eddie was basically buried in it. The sleeves fell past his fingertips and it came down to his mid thighs. And warm, so *warm*. Richie melted at the sight, staring with a big, stupid grin on his face.

"Gee, could get used to that view," he sighed.

Eddie turned his face away from Richie, flustered, and continued walking up the street. Richie watched him for a moment, then jogged to catch up.

Eddie had rolled the sleeves up enough so his hands were free.

They walked the rest of the way to Eddie's house in silence, hand in hand, Eddie feeling much more comfortable than before.

They stopped walking when they reached the gate to his front yard. Eddie started to take the jacket off but Richie stopped him. "You can keep it, for now."

"Oh," he paused. "Why?"

Richie shrugged. "Gives you a reason to see me again."

“Oh.”

“That is, if you wanted to see me again?”

Eddie hesitated, then nodded. “Yeah, sure.”

Richie grinned at him. “Well okay then,” he reached his hand towards Eddie, “was a pleasure.” Eddie shook it, and turned toward his house, giving Richie one last glance over his shoulder as he walked down to his front door.

Richie stood and watched him for a moment, then, as Eddie was halfway to the door, he called out.

“Hey Eds, wait a moment.”

Eddie stopped and turned back around, eyebrows raised. “Hm?”

Richie half-jogged over and stood right in front of him, wrapping his arms around the shorter boy's waist.

“What are you-” he was interrupted with Richie's mouth pressed against his. He pushed him away, and Richie had to catch himself so he didn't fall.

“Dude, what the fuck!” he whisper-yelled, checking back over his shoulder, making sure his mother couldn't see them. Luckily, all the curtains were closed and there wasn't any sign of movement in the house.

Richie was taken aback, and confused. “Are you serious? I thought we had a good night?”

“You don't just- you don't just *do that* to people you just met,” he spat out, and fumbled for his inhaler. “Fuck, fuck, fu-,” he brought the inhaler to his mouth and pressed down, breathing in sharply, then breathing deeply a few times until his chest started to feel less constricted. He collapsed onto his knees on the grass, holding a hand over his mouth. Richie stood over him, unsure of what to do. Eddie felt tears welling up behind his eyes and tried his hardest to hold them back.

Richie knelt down next to him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

Eddie shrugged him off.

"You need to go," he choked out. The tears started to fall then, he couldn't help it.

"Eds, I-" "Don't fucking call me that." Eddie didn't look up, or move at all. He could see tears falling down into the grass. Richie stayed there, staring at him for a minute or so, then turned and walked off.

"Whatever, man. Fuck this," Eddie heard him mumble as he left.

Eventually he got up and went inside, tiptoeing up the stairs, hoping desperately that he wouldn't wake up his mother. He shut the door to his bedroom and fell face first onto the bed. He sobbed for a while, attempting to muffle the noise in his pillow. When he ran out of tears he turned onto his back and stared at the ceiling. There were glow in the dark stars above his bed, that he had stuck there when he was much younger and had never bothered to take down.

*Fuck.*

He was still wearing the stupid jacket.

He sat up and tore it off, throwing it onto the floor. He figured he would just give it to Bill and he could pass it on to Richie.

*Fucking Richie.*

Eddie held his knees close to his chest and put his head down.

*Fucking RICHIE.*

Surely he wasn't making a big deal out of it, right? I mean, people don't kiss each other when they've only just met... Do they? Not like he would know anything about that.

He did actually enjoy the night, up until the end. Well, enjoyed the parts where he wasn't too busy being flustered or annoyed or terrified by this person, who insisted on sharing popcorn and smiled too much and held his hand, *why did he let him hold his hand?* And who let someone else drive his car so he could walk home with him. And who

kissed him only a few hours after meeting him. The first person to ever kiss him.

Eddie ran his fingers over his lips.

He could remember exactly how he kissed him. He traced the outline of where Richie's lips were, his fingertips barely touching his face. A shiver went down his spine.

*The first person to ever kiss him.*

And he fucking freaked out. Like he freaks out about everything. And how nothing good could ever happen to him because he ruins it before it has a chance.

He started to regret the way he reacted. He pulled at his hair, wishing he could go back an hour, start again, do it differently.

He stood up from bed and grabbed Richie's jacket. He looked at it in his hands for a moment, trying to figure out what he was about to do.

Richie had found his way to Bill's house rather easily. He had gotten his keys back and was sitting on the hood of his truck, music quietly pouring from the radio. He had a cigarette hanging from his mouth, his second one since he had been sitting there. He was cold, and he started to wish he hadn't given his only jacket away.

*What was that kid's deal anyway?*

Richie didn't know what to think about everything that had happened. Part of him felt pissed off, the other part of him felt quite upset. Bill had warned him that Eddie would be nervous, but he had still assumed he at least *wanted* to go out with him. Instead, it was as if he was just being forced to do it. And he did actually think he was cute.

Richie took a long drag of his cigarette. *Shouldn't have got my fucking hopes up.*

He finished off the cigarette and jumped off his truck, dropping the butt on the ground and putting it out with his shoe. He decided it had gotten too cold to be out, so he turned to head into Bill's house. He had organised to sleep on the couch for a couple nights until Bill's parents got home. From there, well, he would just have to figure it out. Probably couch hop around, sleep in his truck some nights, maybe he could even find a shitty enough motel for a night or two.

He kept his eyes down as he walked around and reached in the window to turn off the radio.

“Hey.”

He swung his head around, expecting to see Bill, but was surprised to see Eddie standing in front of him, wearing a dark blue sweatshirt over his outfit from that night, Richie's denim jacket hung over his shoulder.

Richie turned to face him fully, leaning up against the side of his truck.

“I just- you should have this back.” Eddie pushed the jacket towards him, and he took it, putting it on without much hesitation.

“Thanks for that, I expect you washed and ironed it before returning it, I can tell y'know.” Richie pretended to inspect the jacket, mouth upturned. Eddie laughed, but stopped when he made eye contact with Richie, looking away.

“Why do you do that?”

“Do what?” Eddie asked.

“It's like every time you smile, as soon as I look at you, you stop. You get – embarrassed, or something. Like, fuck dude,” he sighed.

“I- I don't know.” Eddie forced himself to make eye contact. “I didn't know I was doing it-”

“Because you're actually fucking cute, when you laugh-” Eddie

swallowed hard. Richie shoved his hands into his pockets. "It's fine if you don't- *like* me, or whatever, but-" he could see that Eddie was starting to look uncomfortable.

Richie shook his head at himself. "Never mind, it's fine. Thanks for bringing the jacket back I guess."

He pulled the box of cigarettes from his pocket and took one, putting it between his lips and reached back in for his lighter.

Eddie watched him carefully as he lit the end of the cigarette and pulled on it, waiting a moment before letting the smoke pour out his mouth. He eventually moved so he was standing next to Richie. Richie didn't protest, in fact neither of them said anything. They just stood together for a while. Richie finished the cigarette and went for another one. Before he could light it, Eddie stepped back up onto the pavement, giving him enough height to pull him by the collar into a kiss, his eyes shut tight. Richie was caught off guard, but he slowly melted into it. He grabbed Eddie's waist and pulled him closer, and Eddie wrapped his arms around his neck, tangling his fingers into Richie's hair.

They made out against Richie's pick-up truck for a considerable amount of time, pausing every now and then to just look at each other's faces, and then fall back into each other. A car drove past and beeped at them, and Richie flipped them off without taking his attention off Eddie.

Bill discovered the two of them on his couch the next morning, Eddie lying on top of Richie, face buried in his neck, and Richie's arms wrapped around him.

### 3. Cliff Jumping

Bill Denbrough stood at the bottom of the stairwell, looking over at Eddie and Richie, both of them still fast asleep. When he first saw them, he had immediately ran back upstairs and called the rest of his friend group on the phone, telling them all to get over there as fast as possible.

Stan had arrived first. His mouth had fell open when he saw them lying there, eyebrows raised.

“Fuck, that was quick,” he had muttered to Bill, and then sauntered off to the kitchen to make himself some breakfast, as he hadn't had the chance before he received the call to come over.

Beverly arrived with Mike Hanlon a few minutes after, chatting idly as they walked in. Bill put a finger to his lips, shushing them. They had looked at him with confused expressions, but when they walked closer and saw Eddie and Richie, Beverly's quickly switched to excitement. Mike on the other hand, looked more confused, (he, like Eddie, had never met Richie before, though he had heard stories,) and looked toward Bill for an explanation.

“That's Richie, they w-went on a date last night.” Bill said in a hushed voice. Mike nodded and gave Bill a thumbs up.

They all froze as Eddie shifted, lifting his head up a little. He opened one eye and saw Richie lying beneath him, glasses askew on his face, mouth wide open, snoring quietly away. Eddie smiled sleepily and fell back into the crook of Richie's neck. He hadn't noticed the four other people staring at him from the other side of the room, much to their amusement.

Ben Hanscom walked through the door soon after. “Hey Bill, I'm-” he was interrupted by a chorus of “shh!”s from the group.

Beverly grabbed him by the arm and walked him over. “Don't wake the kids!”

Richie suddenly started to wake up, scrunching up his face and rubbing his eyes. They half-opened and had to shield his face from the sunlight coming through the window. He then looked down at Eddie, who was nuzzling his nose against Richie's jawbone. He exhaled happily, and ran a hand through Eddie's hair.

"Morning babe." he whispered, smiling.

"Morning!" Stan and Beverly exclaimed at the same time.

Eddie's head shot up, wide eyed, looking like a startled deer. He pushed himself up, almost falling into the coffee table and knocking the wind out of Richie in the process. The rest of the group were beside themselves. "Have a good sleep there, Eddie?" Stan asked, biting his lip to stop himself from laughing.

"What the *fuck* you guys," Eddie wheezed, and Richie sat up, stretching his arms above his head.

"Yeah, a little privacy would be nice," he teased, sleepily trying to pull Eddie back towards him, but he just swatted his hand away.

"We're going to the quarry, feel free to join us when you're finished here, okay boys?" Beverly chirped, winking at Eddie, and then linked her arm with Ben's and walked to the front door, Mike and Stan in pursuit. Bill turned to follow behind them.

"Don't m-mess up my house Rich, my f-folks will be back tomorrow," he called out as before he shut the door.

Eddie collapsed onto the couch beside Richie with a huff. Richie put an arm around his shoulder.

"Oh man, the quarry, it's been a while since I've been there," he said fondly.

"You wanna go?" Eddie yawned, leaning into his chest.

Richie looked at him, with a sleepy grin on his face. He hadn't seen him in good light before now, and he noticed a lot of things that he hadn't last night. Eddie had a spattering of freckles over his nose and cheeks, and long eyelashes that would have made any girl jealous.



His features made him look younger than he was, he could have easily been mistaken for thirteen or fourteen, despite actually being almost eighteen. And his height certainly didn't help.

The sunlight coming in through the window made his eyes look almost golden. Richie was hypnotised at this point.

"You're fucking beautiful," he mumbled, pushing his face into Eddie's hair.

Eddie let out a happy sigh and closed his eyes, taking in the warmth coming from the open window and the slow rise and fall of Richie's chest as he leaned up against him. He was overwhelmingly tempted to just fall back asleep and not move for the rest of the day, but Richie carefully moved him and stood up, stretching with an exaggerated groan.

"C'mon, we should go meet up with the others." He offered a hand to Eddie, to pull him up. Eddie whined in protest.

"M'tired."

"Hi tired, I'm Richie, now up you get."

Eddie rolled his eyes at the joke but took his hand and stood up, so he was standing basically on Richie's feet, barely any space between them.

"God, those are filthy."

He grabbed Richie's glasses of his face and wiped them on the edge of his sweatshirt, holding them up to the light and then wiping them down some more, until he was as satisfied as he could be without having used cleaning spray. Eddie went to hand them back, but slipped them onto his own face instead.

"Wow," he said, looking around the room, "you're blind as fuck."

"Well I'm not exactly wearing those as a fashion statement, am I?" he laughed. Eddie took off the glasses and gave them back to Richie, who put them on and pushed them up the bridge of his nose.

Richie jumped in the shower as Eddie went to Bill's room to get some clean clothes. He had borrowed clothes from him before and he reckoned it wouldn't be an issue. The bathroom was right next to the bedroom and Eddie could hear Richie singing, quite loudly, and quite well, surprisingly.

*Sleight of hands and twist of fate*

*On a bed of nails she makes me wait*

*And I wait, without you,*

He picked out a t-shirt and a pair of khaki shorts, not worrying too much, seeing as they were usually just in their underwear when they went to the quarry.

The thought of seeing Richie in his underwear made his stomach flip.

And the thought of Richie seeing *him* in his underwear made the feeling twice as bad.

He shook the thought out of his head. He wasn't necessarily self-conscious about his body, he was actually in quite good shape, ever since his mother had given in and allowed him to try out for track at school.

And he had been around the quarry with the boys (and Bev), plenty of times, and even in the change rooms in the gym, and never worried about being practically naked in front of anyone before.

"It'll be fine," he uttered to himself.

*With or without youuuuuuuuu*

*I can't live, with or without youuuuuuuUUUUUUUU*

Richie's 'singing' had turned more or less into wailing at this point. He had been in there for over fifteen minutes, and Eddie needed to shower as well, seeing as he could still smell popcorn butter and cigarette smoke on his skin. He went and banged on the door. Richie's singing stopped abruptly, and he heard the water stop quickly after.

Soon Richie unlocked and opened the door, with only a towel wrapped around his waist, his hair still dripping wet and stuck to his face. Eddie shuffled past him, not allowing himself to stare.

They were both dressed, had eaten breakfast, and were heading out the door within the next hour. It was nearing midday, and the outside air was pleasantly warm. Richie still wore his denim jacket, only with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows.

They hopped in the truck and drove off with the windows down. Eddie closed his eyes and tilted his head half out, the wind hitting his face and definitely messing up his hair, but he didn't mind. The radio was playing some song he sort of recognised but didn't know the words to. Richie hummed along to it idly, taking the moment in as much as he could.

They arrived at their destination all too soon, it felt. Richie parked the car on the side of the road. There was a growth of trees obscuring the view from the road, but they could hear faint squeals and giggles in the distance.

*That's probably them,* Eddie thought.

They made their way through the trees, and after a couple minutes they came across five bikes, four of them were just thrown on the ground, only one of them was standing, leaning against the kickstand, belonging to Stan Uris. Next to the bikes was a pile of clothing.

Richie walked over to the edge of cliff. The rest of the gang were splashing around in the water 30 feet below. Bill had climbed on Mike's shoulders and Beverly on Ben's in a chicken fight, laughing and squealing as they tried to push each other off. Beverly quickly won, Bill (and consequentially Mike), falling backwards into the water and coming up gasping, but smiling. Beverly fist pumped the air above her head and let out a victory hoot.

"Mind if we join you?" Richie called out from above, cupping his hands around his mouth.

"You have to jump though!" Stan yelled back at him, "Eddie too!"

Richie gave them a thumbs up and jogged back over to Eddie, who had only taken off his shoes and watch. Richie started stripping down, throwing his jacket and shirt on top of the pile of the others clothes. Eddie couldn't help but stare.

*Fuck*, he was skinny. Like, *really* skinny. You could all but see his ribs.

He was also even paler than Eddie. It made his hair and eyes look so much darker in contrast.

Richie smirked to himself when he caught Eddie staring. He stepped out of his skinny jeans, revealing black boxer shorts underneath.

Eddie almost tripped as he shook his shorts off, now only wearing a pair of white briefs.

Richie was waiting for him at the edge of the cliff, and he could hear the others chanting from below, eager for the boys to jump.

Richie turned his head towards Eddie.

"You checking me out, love?"

Eddie went a hot shade of pink and shook his head, though he still had a dorky grin planted on his face.

"Well, you should be." Richie winked at him, and then leaped off the rock without hesitation, hollering as he did. Eddie heard a big splash followed by cheers from the others.

"Your turn Ed!" Mike yelled from down below. Eddie stood *just* out of view on the rock.

He had jumped a handful of times before, but still, standing up there, that high off the ground, never failed to make him incredibly nervous. He took a deep breath in and then made a running jump. He held his breath as he fell, he always did. The drop felt so much farther than it looked. Every time he jumped, he always panicked that he would never hit the water. That he would fall forever. Stuck in time.

But of course, logically, he hit the water feet first, and his legs stung as he did, but he didn't care because that meant it was over. He came up to the surface and gasped for air, and they all applauded him, and he laughed along, smiling wide, feeling pretty out of breath but under control.

For the rest of the afternoon they swam and played and messed around on the rocks, like they had been doing since they were kids. Richie made sure he spent time talking to everyone individually, including Mike and Ben, who he hadn't known when he lived in Derry ten or so years back. They both immediately took a liking to him, even laughing at some of his jokes, though they were eye-roll worthy at best and mildly offensive at worst.

He spent the most time with Beverly though, even separating from the group at one point to go have a more serious conversation on the rocks without anyone else hearing, though Bill had assured Eddie it wasn't anything to worry about, just that Bev and Richie had been rather close back in the day. Eddie just accepted this as it was, and tried not to think about it too much.

He and Stan went to sit next to the edge of the water. He had noticed Stan had been a little.. *off*, but he knew he would probably come forward himself if something was bothering him. He was usually pretty open with Eddie, and vice versa. Stan was the first one he had ever come out to, back when he was 14, a whole month before he told anyone else in their group. He was a good listener.

“Eddie, how-” Stan bit his lip, unsure of how to ask what he wanted to ask, “how did you know? That you, y’know,” he trailed off, poking at a bruise on his knee.

“That I what?” Eddie asked, though he was pretty sure he knew where this was going.

“That you liked boys?”

Eddie saw that Stan was looking over at Bill, who was currently being splashed mercilessly by Mike, giggling, using his hands as a shield.

Eddie shrugged. “Dunno really. Everyone would talk about how they had crushes on girls and I never did. I never really noticed girls in the same way other boys said they did. But I realised that I had those feelings for guys instead, and one day it just sorta clicked.” Of course it wasn't that simple, really, but that was the gist of it.

“What does it feel like, when you like someone then?”

“It's like-” Eddie paused. He wasn't sure he would be able to put it in words. “It's like, you feel weird in your stomach, and you just want to look at them all the time and you think about them a lot when they're not around.”

“Oh.”

They sat in silence for a couple minutes, watching Ben and Mike team up on Bill in quite a brutal water fight.

“I think I like Bill.” Stan said, almost under his breath, like he didn't want to say it out loud but couldn't stop himself.

Eddie wasn't surprised by the confession, but he didn't want Stan to know that. He elbowed him gently and gave him the softest smile he could manage. Stan leaned his head on Eddie's shoulder, looking down. Eddie could tell he had said all he needed to say. Neither of them were much about big emotional conversations.

The sun had started to set by the time they all walked up to collect their things, and the warmth was slowly disappearing from the air, replaced by the familiar chill from the night before. They all sorted out who's clothes belonged to who (except Eddie, who had folded his and set it apart from everyone else's). They all got dressed, pointing out each other's sunburn while Eddie schooled them about skin cancer.

They started to walk as a group out to the road.

"Does anyone want a lift? Got room for three in the truck," Richie offered, but they all said they were happy biking it. He didn't argue.

He and Richie stood and watched Beverly, Mike, and Ben ride off.

"See you at home!" Bill called out as he started off in the other direction next to Stan. Eddie figured he had probably asked to stay over for the night.

The drive home was much like the drive there, windows down, radio volume all the way up. Eddie was sure he was going to develop hearing problems if he had to do this often.

When they were about halfway to Bill's, Richie turned the radio down.

"What's wrong?" Eddie asked after a moment. Richie looked genuinely worried about something.

"I'm just- I wasn't planning on staying." His voice was uneasy.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm only here for, I don't know, a couple weeks, and then I was gonna leave. This was supposed to be a short visit to catch up but then Bill told me about you and I thought I'd give it a shot but," he exhaled sharply, reached into his pocket to grab a cigarette and lit in with the lighter under the radio. "I honestly thought this would just be a little fling, you know? And we would have our fun and then I would go."

Eddie's breath hitched in his throat. He couldn't make sense of it, *who the hell says shit like that*, he thought.

His first thought was to get angry, to lecture Richie about how fucking shitty that was. He tried to script out what he was going to say in his head. It had been about a minute of the most tense silence he had ever experienced.

"You're an asshole," he finally choked out, and it wasn't anywhere near as angry as he wanted, but Richie still flinched at the tone of his voice, dry and serious. Richie had heard those words plenty of times before with humour from his friends, and in high pitched scoffs from girls at parties who slapped him or threw drinks in his face, but this time, it hit really hard. He felt like he had been punched in the chest.

"Yeah, I know."

Eddie had turned so he was looking out the window. He knew if he looked at Richie he might start crying and that was absolutely the last thing he wanted to do.

"So, this is just you having your fun then? Because i'm not just going to make out with you for two weeks and then let you leave if that's all you want. You can go find someone else to do that with."

"It's not like that, dude, I-"

"You *just* said that's what it was!" Eddie was trying desperately to hold back tears.

"Yeah it *was*, that was what I had planned before I got here but then you," he threw the half finished cigarette out the window, "I actually like you. A lot, and I've been trying to figure out what the hell to do about that and I just don't know."

Eddie's expression softened. He looked over at Richie, and from what he could tell he was being sincere.

"That still doesn't mean anything if you're leaving." Eddie let out in a hoarse whisper.

They drove the rest of the way in silence. Richie stopped in front of Eddie's house and they sat with the engine off, the sky having turned



a fantastic shade of pink.

“Why not just stay?” Eddie said, breaking the silence. “Like, why do you need to leave?”

“No where to stay, I can't just sleep on people's couches forever.”  
*Besides, staying in one place would kill me.*

“You could come with me.” Richie said. “Drive around the country, sleep under the stars, Life a'la Tozier.” He was really only half joking.

“My mother would never let me.”

“You're almost eighteen aren't you? She can't control you for much longer.”

Eddie laughed. “You don't know my mother.”

They sat there, looking at each other, hoping for a solution to just appear. But nothing came, and Eddie kissed Richie on the cheek before hopping out of the car and walking to the front door. He looked back as he opened the door. Richie gave a small wave and turned the keys in the ignition, driving away towards Bill's.

Eddie watched him go before closing the door behind him.

## 4. Weird Science

### Summary for the Chapter:

hey look different pov's

Back at his house, Bill and Stan were rummaging through the kitchen, trying to find something decent to eat. Bill's parents had been gone for a week, and the food had disappeared faster than expected due to the fact that his friends had been there almost every day.

Stan found a bag of microwave popcorn and they decided that would be fine, they weren't that hungry anyway.

Bill nuked the popcorn while Stan went into the living room to find a movie for them to watch.

"Ghostbusters?" he called out.

"W-watched it a couple days ago, remember?"

"How about Heathers?"

Bill walked into the room holding a bowl of popcorn, and slumped down on the couch.

"Nah."

Stan scanned through the shelf of VCRs. He pulled one out and turned to Bill.

"Weird Science?" he asked, smirking.

"R-really?" Bill scoffed. Stan stood holding the movie in front of his chest, rocking back and forth on his feet.

"Oh come on Bill, you love this one," he looked eagerly at Bill, who rolled his eyes and groaned.

"Fine, but next we're w-watching Raiders." Stan grinned and knelt

down in front of the tv to put the VCR in the slot.

He joined Bill on the couch with the popcorn bowl between them. The tv hummed to life and they had to rewind the tape to the beginning, Bill muttering about how he has to rewind them every time people borrow them.

Stan took the bowl back to the kitchen when it was empty. They were about halfway through the film. Bill had been completely invested in it, watching intensively despite having watched it plenty of times before. Which was good, because it meant he didn't notice Stan had spent most of that time watching *him*, thinking back to what he had told Eddie earlier that day.

He stood over the sink, head down, jaw clenched tight. "Fuck," he whispered to himself.

His heart was pounding so hard in his chest that he thought he might throw up or pass out or something. His face was uncomfortably hot, and he felt sweat building up on the back of his neck.

He looked up at his own reflection in the window.  
"Forget it, he's straight."

Stan knew that Bill had it bad for Beverly. He had had a crush on her since they met her, back in elementary school.

Stan had always felt weird about the way Bill talked to Beverly. Whenever he used to see them together he would get weirdly and irrationally upset, but he didn't feel like that with any of his other friends. He had ignored and repressed those thoughts until a couple of weeks ago, when Bill had slept over at his house. They shared a bed, as they had always done, as they did with all their other friends, and Stan hadn't been able to sleep. Instead he had just watched Bill, feeling guilty and lightheaded, his whole body shivering whenever Bill would brush up against him.

They had met up with the others the next day, and Stan had walked

just a bit closer to him, listened just a bit more when he was talking, smiling like a dork the whole time, completely confused by his own actions yet mildly terrified that he knew what was going on.

“What's wrong S-stan?”

Stan jumped and swung around. Bill was standing in the doorway to the kitchen, the tv light surrounding him in this flickering halo.

“Nothing, I was just, uh, putting the bowl back.”

“Does that usually t-t-take ten minutes?” he laughed softly.

*Ten minutes? It had felt like 30 seconds.*

“You gonna c-come back in or n-not? Because if you're not th-then I'm putting on a d-different mov-”

“Bill I'm gay.”

He covered his mouth with both hands as soon as he said it, looking at the ground with horror written on his face. Bill stared at him with his eyebrows raised.

“Oh, well, that's cool,” he said cautiously, not really sure how to react. Of course he didn't mind, why would he? But still, it was very sudden confession.

“Oh, god, I didn't mean to-” he shook his head rapidly, “I'm sorry, shit, why did I-”

“C-calm down, it's fine!” Bill walked over to him and wrapped him in a hug. “I'm glad you told me, okay? E-even if it was a bit abrupt,” he pulled back and put his hands on Stan's shoulders. Stan just nodded, taking a deep breath in. He was still avoiding eye contact.

Bill led him back into the living room with a hand on his back. They sat on the couch, Bill resting his head on Stan's shoulder, his feet tucked up under him. Stan had his feet on the floor and his hands in his lap, and eventually he leaned his head against Bill's.

When the movie ended, Stan realised that Bill had fallen asleep. He turned the tv off with the remote.

“Bill,” he whispered, nudging him softly with his shoulder. Bill let out a small whine and curled himself up tighter, almost on top of Stan.

“C'mon, Richie will need the couch,” he said before standing and pulling Bill up with him. They walked up the stairs, Bill basically still asleep, leaning on Stan so much that he may as well have been carrying him.

They got into Bill's bed. Bill fell fast asleep almost instantly, and Stan dozed off not too long after.

Eddie, on the other hand, was as awake as ever, lying on his back, agitated beyond relief. He kept glancing over at the window, almost expecting Richie to appear outside, crouched on a tree branch, waiting for him to slide it open and let him in. He wasn't sure if he really wanted this to happen. He told himself he didn't. *But then why was he constantly looking?*

He rolled over and buried his face in his pillow. He wanted to scream, maybe that would get rid of the feeling in his chest, like someone was punching him from the inside. But his mother was snoring loudly only a few rooms away, and he definitely didn't want to wake her.

He could sneak out again, go to Bill's and he and Richie could make out on the hood of his truck again, but he knew that wouldn't be a good decision. He wanted to get the point across that he wasn't a sleaze, that he was only in if it was going to be serious. But the more he laid there, thinking about the day before, the more he didn't care. He really just wanted to be touched right now, and it would be so easy to do.

He fought with himself over this for a few hours, at time getting out of bed and pacing around, even going so far as to pull clothes out of

his drawer and almost changing into them, but he forced himself to stop.

It was three in the morning when he finally got under the covers, purposefully with his back to the window, and closed his eyes. He reckoned if he just laid there with his eyes closed for long enough he would fall asleep.

*Why do you care so much if he goes? You only just met him.*

The thought entered his mind from seemingly nowhere. *Why did he care?*

It honestly surprised him. He tried to think of things that he knew about Richie.

*He owns a pick-up truck. Obviously.*

*He liked loud music.*

*He wears his jacket even when it's hot out.*

*He laughs at his own jokes.*

*He-*

Eddie realised that none of these things were really personal at all, all just things he picked up through observation. He couldn't think of a single thing that Richie had actually *told* him about himself.

*Where does he live?*

*Is he in school?*

*How old is he anyway? He could be twenty-something for all he knew.*

Eddie suddenly felt very weird about the situation. He knew nothing! They might not have anything in common at all, everything that Eddie had picked up seemed to be quite the opposite of his own lifestyle. Richie's clothes, choice of transport, music taste, demeanour,

everything.

And what had he told Richie about himself?

He tried to recall something, *anything*, but realised that they hadn't actually had an actual conversation yet, really the only time they had talked properly was that afternoon in the car, and that wasn't exactly a positive experience.

*So why does he care?*

Eddie started to think that maybe he was just on a high, only *thinking* he likes this guy when in reality he's just being given attention from someone new, someone who touched him and treated him so differently than his friends did, who flirted and said he was beautiful, the things he had been craving for so long without realising.

His head started to hurt, and he forced everything to the back of his mind, telling himself he would with it all when the sun was up, finally feeling like he might be able to fall asleep.

Stan woke up to the sound of multiple people walking up the hallway towards the bedroom. He looked over at Bill's bedside table, and the digital radio clock read 11.30am. He shook Bill awake.

"Dude, I think your parents are home."

Bill moaned and rubbed his eyes. "Mmwhat?" he mumbled, half sitting up.

"Your parents, they were getting back today, right?"

"Shit."

Bill immediately shot up and stumbled over to the door, unlocking it just before the handle started to turn. His parents didn't like it when he locked his bedroom door, saying they should be able to check on him whenever they wanted.

"Billy!" Georgie exclaimed when he saw him, smiling as wide as he could. Bill hugged him tight, lifting him briefly off his feet.

George Denbrough was 12 years old, and looked a lot like Bill, except his face was a little rounder, and his hair much lighter, nearing blonde.

“Hey Georgie, how was the holiday?”

“So cool, you should have come Bill!” Bill laughed and ruffled his hair.

He walked over to hug his parents, and Georgie noticed Stan standing over near the bed. Stan waved and he skipped over, wrapping his arms around him.

“Hey Stan!” he stepped back, “what are you doing here?”

“H-he slept over,” Bill answered from the doorway.

“Oh, cool,” Georgie giggled, and left Bill's room headed to his own.

His dad shut the door as they walked away, and Stan looked at Bill endearingly.

“Your brother is *so freaking adorable*.”

Bill rolled his eyes. Everyone in their friendship group loved Georgie, sometimes even more than they did him, Bill thought.

Downstairs, Richie was still asleep on the couch. Bill's parents obviously hadn't noticed him when they arrived, thank god. Stan woke him up and shoved him out the back door, while Bill neaten up the couch cushions.

Richie had also spent most of the night lying awake, his thoughts were way too loud and intense, his brain screaming at him for hours, making him dizzy and pushing him into a state of dissociation.

He got in his truck and lit a cigarette, hoping it would be enough to ground him enough that he could go talk to Eddie. Properly talk to him. Try to sort this whole thing out.



He didn't have long though, because soon Eddie was tapping on the passenger side window.

Richie reached over to unlock the door, and Eddie got in.

"We need to talk," he said as sternly as he could, making eye contact that may have been a little too intense, "about ho-"

"About how we know nothing about each other, right?"

Eddie bit his lip. "Yeah."

Richie took one last drag of his cigarette.

"My name is Richie Tozier, my parents dragged me away from Derry when I was ten years old, I left home on my eighteenth birthday and drove halfway across the country in a shitty pick-up truck to see the only real friends I ever had, and apparently to make out with you," his voice was relatively upbeat and he was smiling a little, but his face was just so tired, and Eddie felt his heart drop further into his stomach with almost every word that came out of his mouth. "I talk too loud and I annoy the hell out of most people, I skipped fourth grade, no one can figure out how, not even myself. I haven't called my parents in two weeks, they have no idea where I am, I'm going to spend my life just going where ever I feel like going and doing whatever I feel like doing." He took a deep breath and turned to face Eddie. "And I've known I was gay since I was twelve, and yet I had never kissed a boy before I met you."

"I was your first kiss?" Eddie was rather shocked by this.

"No," Richie let out a weak laugh, "I've kissed girls plenty of times, but I never really liked any of them. Not how I like you, anyway."

"Oh."

"Now, is that enough, cause I could get more in depth, but I thought you might just want the basics first, you know, just incase you decide you hate me or something."

"It's fine," Eddie said in a much softer tone than when he got into the car. Richie looked at him, Eddie realised, waiting for him to talk.

"Well, I-" he didn't really know where to start. "I've been here my whole life, I met Bill and the others in eighth grade in History class, I take about three hundred different medications and if I'm completely honest I don't know what they all do, but my mother says they're important and I've been taking them for so long that I've just accepted it, my dad died when I was five and I don't remember him much at all," he looked at Richie who was listening intently, nodding at him to continue, "people say I'm a hypochondriac, and I know I probably am. I used to run track. I've gotten B's my whole life. I guess I always knew I was gay. You were my first kiss. I really hate the smell of cigarette smoke but I can't bring myself to care when you do it."

Richie was now looking at the steering wheel, and for a moment Eddie thought he was going to tell him to get out of the car.

But then he started laughing.

It started really quietly, just chuckling to himself, but soon it built up into full blown laughter, tears welling behind his eyes. Eddie was confused, but soon he started laughing too, until both of them were basically howling. They both had this feeling overwhelmingly melancholy.

"We're both just fucking screwed up then, yeah?" Richie said, wiping his eyes with his palms, his cheeks starting to ache. Eddie just nodded, feeling pretty breathless. They both calmed down, and there was silence once again.

A few minutes later Bill walked out to the truck, and Richie rolled down the window for him.

"Bev just called, s-says there's a party at Betty Ripsom's t-tonight."

"Sounds fun!" Richie replied. Bill turned to Eddie.

"Y-you in?" he asked.

Eddie didn't enjoy parties. Especially Betty Ripsom's parties, which were usually too crowded and everyone got plastered, and he always ended up holding one of his friend's hair back while they throw up in

the backyard. But he would probably end up getting dragged there anyway, so he didn't see the point in saying no.

“Sure, sounds fun,” he sighed, grinning at Bill.

“C-cool, see you guys later.”

## 5. The effects of alcohol on young minds

### Summary for the Chapter:

owo whats this  
warning they get drunk adn it gets .... steamy ;)

There were cars parked all the way up Betty Ripsom's street that night. Richie had offered to be designated driver, seeing as he was the only one with a car. He had driven Eddie, Bill, Stan, and Beverly there, Mike and Ben having gotten a lift with someone else.

When they arrived, Beverly had immediately gone off to find them, while Bill and Stan made a beeline for the kitchen and poured themselves what would surely be the first of many, *many*, drinks.

There were maybe fifty people inside and another twenty or so in the backyard. To Eddie it felt more like hundreds. *Why the hell would you ever let this many people in your house? Who even knows this many people?*

Music was blasting through a speaker system in the living room. Eddie made a point of avoiding that part of the house and went the long way around to the kitchen. Richie followed close behind.

Eddie grabbed himself a solo cup, and rinsed it under the faucet before using it. Richie watched him gently laughing to himself, leaned up against the counter.

"Do you want me to get you something?" Eddie asked as he poured a shot's worth of vanilla-flavoured vodka into his cup.

Richie shook his head. "No thanks, I don't drink."

Eddie tilted his head. "Really?"

"Yeah, my old man was an alcoholic, kinda turned me off the stuff."

Eddie's face dropped, and he looked guiltily down to the cup in his hand. "Oh sh- sorry."

“Hey it's fine! I don't care if other people do it, I actually kind of want to see what you're like when you're drunk.”

Eddie smirked at him. “Oh yeah, you're gonna love me in about half an hour.” Then he downed his shot, throwing his head back.

“That was *the* hottest thing I have ever seen.”

Bill and Stan always made sure they drank the same amount when they went to parties. It ensured they didn't go *too* overboard, but it also meant they became slightly competitive about it. An hour in and they had had five shots and three beers each, which meant they were both feeling pretty fucking amazing, to say the least.

They had made their way into the middle of the sea of people in the living room, and were slow-dancing to a very upbeat and bass-heavy song.

Bill had his arms wrapped around Stan's neck, and Stan's arms around Bill's waist, pressed up against each other as much as possible, their chins resting on each other's shoulders, rocking slowly back and forth, completely out of rhythm to the song.

Bill was blissfully zoned out, feeling so incredibly warm and fuzzy inside, and so goddamn *comfortable* with Stan holding him the way he was, not even noticing the people around him. He pressed his face into Stan's neck and smiled, not realising what he was doing to the poor boy.

Stan was more flustered than he had ever been in his entire life. His face was bright red, and his stomach was doing fucking backflips. Every time he felt Bill's eyelashes brush against his skin he felt like he might collapse. This was torture. All he wanted to do was just grab Bill's face and kiss him, but he forced himself to stay steady, putting his focus towards tracing circles on Bill's lower back.

“You're such a good dancer ssStanny,” Bill slurred, his lips just barely touching Stan's collarbone. Stan whimpered involuntarily, feeling his heart pounding.

"I love you," Stan whispered into Bill's ear.

"I love you too."

"No I—" Stan swallowed hard, trying to get rid of the lump in his throat, "I love you, like so fucking much."

Bill hummed a noise of what might have been agreement, or just because he was plastered, who could tell. Stan just tightened his grip around his waist.

In the corner of the backyard, leaning up against the fence, Beverly and Mike were passing a joint back and forth while Ben lied down on the grass between them.

Ben had drank quite a lot, but was on the way down, and Mike and Bev had only had a couple shots each.

"So like, how do you guys know Richie? You never really mentioned him before and then he just shows up?" Mike asked Bev, taking the joint from her and putting it to his lips.

"He lived 'round here when we were kids, like in grade school, then he kinda disappeared one day when we were about ten, and we had no idea where he had gone. Like, absolutely no fucking clue. But then Bill got this letter from him, and turns out his parents had just packed up and moved and took him with them, and hadn't actually told him."

"That's fucked," Mike said, then fell into a minor coughing fit, holding the joint back over in front of Beverly.

Bev laughed. "Right? Like who *does* that to their kid?"

"So fucked," Ben mumbled, looking up at the starry sky with heavy eyelids, swearing that he could feel the earth spinning beneath him.

Bev took another hit, blowing the smoke out of her nose. Ben's eyes went wide as he saw her do it, suddenly awestruck.

"Beverly, you're a dragon!" he slurred excitedly, and Mike started

giggling uncontrollably.

Beverly grinned at Ben, and leaned over to kiss his forehead. Ben blushed when she did, a dreamy smile on his face. He rolled his head to look up at Mike. "I just got kissed by a fucking dragon, dude." This only caused Mike to laugh more.

"So anyway, we hadn't heard from Richie in *ages*, like in two years or something, and then out of nowhere he calls Bill and tells him he's coming back to visit. And Bill thought it would be the perfect opportunity to set Eddie up, and, well, that obviously worked out."

"I'll fucking say," Mike said.

On the other side of the backyard, closer to the house, Richie was sitting on a bench, and Eddie, who was the biggest lightweight in the world, as Richie had discovered, was sitting in his lap with his legs wrapped around his waist, currently running his fingers over and over again through Richie's hair.

"It's soooo soft," he muttered to himself, a look of intense concentration on his face, "how the fuck is it this soft?" Richie had tried multiple times to stop Eddie from climbing on top of him, telling himself that in this state, he probably wasn't making the decisions that he should have been, but after Eddie refused to give up, wholly dedicated to his self-appointed mission, which was apparently to be as physically close to Richie as he could, he stopped wrestling with the boy and just let him do what he wanted. He hadn't let him kiss him though, Eddie had tried a few times but Richie knew that he would hate himself if the morning if he did. Not that Richie didn't want to kiss him, god, it was nearly impossible not to, but he forced himself to do that right thing.

To Eddie, the only thing that mattered right now was Richie's hair. He was fixated on it, almost hypnotised, it was the greatest goddamn enigma of the century! Why was no one else paying attention to this! *It was the softest goddamn thing he had ever felt.* Every time he ran his fingers through he swore it just became softer. He felt like he was holding pure melted gold in his hands. It was insane, he couldn't

believe how *lucky* he must have been to be able to experience this.

Richie, of course, was having the time of his life, but it did start to worry him a little after ten minutes had passed and Eddie's concentration had not budged an inch.

"Eddie," he whispered. Eddie looked down at his face, startled, blinking rapidly as if he had forgotten there was an actual human being attached to this magical mess of hair. (He had).

"What?" Eddie asked, suddenly feeling quite dizzy as his awareness of the rest of the world returned.

"Let's go for a walk, yeah?"

Inside, Bill and Stan had found themselves locked in the upstairs bathroom. Neither of them remember actually walking up the stairs, or making the decision to go there, or much at all from the last ten minutes, for that matter. Their minds had become rather preoccupied with the fact that Bill had his tongue shoved into Stan's mouth.

Stan had Bill pressed up against the door, digging his fingers into his waist, while Bill's hands were tangled in his hair.

It was messy, sure, neither of them had ever *made out* with anyone before, and they didn't *really* know what they were doing, and they would have probably both felt awkward about it if they weren't so drunk. But they were, and they continued to drool and moan into each other's mouths, not caring about anything other than the fact that it felt good. Not thinking about what would happen in the morning. Not thinking about how much they would soon regret what they were doing.

Stan switched his attention to Bill's neck, suddenly motivated to leave as many hickeys as he could. Bill just rolled his head to the side and closed his eyes, letting out little whimpers and sounds of pleasure as Stan worked.

"I love you," Stan whispered into Bill's neck, "I love you, I love you, I love you, I-" he bit down, not too hard, but enough that it would



leave a considerable bruise the next day. Bill felt his knees weaken, sure that if Stan hadn't had a death-grip on his waist that he would have just dropped to the ground.

They were interrupted by a knock a door, and they separated, breathing heavily.

Stan looked at Bill, now with big red marks all the way up the side of his neck to his jaw, still wet with his spit. His hair was stick up at the back, his lips slightly swollen and his eyes heavy and tired.

To Stan, he had never looked so beautiful.

Another knock of the door, louder and more angry this time.

"Whoever's sucking face in there, go do it somewhere else. People gotta use the bathroom."

Bill grabbed Stan's arm and opened the door, pulling him out into the hallway.

Richie had escorted Eddie away from the house, and they were now walking up the middle of the road. It was late enough that they didn't have to worry too much about getting run over, but Richie still made sure to keep a close eye out.

Eddie was doing his best to walk in a straight line, using the markings on the road to help him, trying to convince Richie that he wasn't *that* drunk, despite not actually being challenged at all to do so. In Eddie's head he was doing really well. In reality, he looked like he had just got on a tightrope for the first time, wobbling all over the place, holding his arms out to keep balance.

"See, I'm totally doing it!"

"Sure you are, love." Richie walked behind him, prepared to catch him in case he suddenly fell over, which Richie was pretty sure was bound to happen.

They could still hear the music from the party when they were halfway up the street, Eddie couldn't make out what song it was, until Richie started singing along to it under his breath.

*If you're lost, you can look, and you will find me*

*Time after time*

*If you fall, I will catch you, I'll be waiting*

*Time after time*

Eddie stopped walking, feeling his heart flutter when he heard him sing. His voice was so low and smooth, indulgent, almost. Eddie turned to stare at him, jaw dropped open slightly, and he *swore* he could see stars in Richie's eyes (it was just the streetlights reflected in his glasses).

"What's up?" Richie asked.

"Your singing, it's so," he paused, completely lost for words, desperately searching his head for a way to describe what he was feeling and coming up with nothing.

Richie looked at him expectingly, the corner of his mouth lifting up.

Eddie stepped forward and went to kiss him. Richie turned his head so he couldn't, hating himself as he did.

Eddie looked at him, looking hurt. Richie felt the guilt drop into his stomach like a rock.

"Why won't you kiss me?"

Richie shook his head. "You'll hate me if I let you, trust me," he had to fight himself to get the words out.

"I won't, please, I promise I won't," Eddie grabbed at the collar of Richie's jacket, trying to pull him down towards him, but he held his ground.

"You will Ed, not right now, but you will."

Eddie huffed and took a step back, crossing his arms over his chest. He looked incredibly childish, which helped Richie feel a little less awful about not kissing him.

Richie pulled him back towards him, wrapping his arms around him and resting his chin on top of his head. Eddie didn't resist him, just rested his face in Richie's chest and sighed.

"I love you," Eddie whispered. Richie just smiled to himself and didn't respond, knowing that it wasn't true, that it couldn't be true, that Eddie was flat out drunk, but his heart skipped a beat just the same.

Eventually, Richie walked Eddie back to his car and helped him into the passenger seat. Eddie fell asleep pretty much instantly.

Back at the party, things had started to die down, and a lot of people were on their way out. Mike had found a lift and gone home a little earlier on, and Beverly and Ben had fallen asleep outside on the grass, Bev curled up next to him with an arm stretched out across his chest.

Bill and Stan had moved outside, sitting next to each other on the bench where Eddie and Richie had been earlier. They could feel themselves sobering up, their heads starting to throb a little. Stan was resting his head on Bill's shoulder, their hands loosely intertwined.

Bill was nervous. Thinking about what he had done earlier, what *they* had done, made him feel a little sick.

Up until about three hours ago he was sure, without a doubt, that he was straight. He had crushes on girls all the time! And he'd been basically in love with Beverly since eighth grade.

*But straight boys don't make out with other boys.*

He had honestly felt really good when he was doing it. Being kissed and touched like that was amazing. A lot of it could have just been because he was drunk, sure, but it *had* to have been more than that.

He did love Stan, he loved all of his friends, and none of them had ever felt weird about telling each other that before. In fact, they had always been extremely comfortable and affectionate with each other, physically as well as emotionally, and it had never, ever, been of any concern.

But he didn't kiss any of his other friends.

And he didn't touch any of his other friends the way he and Stan had touched each other.

And he didn't feel this *weird* when his other friends were leaning on his shoulder and holding his hand.

Did he like Stan in a different way? He never really thought so before.

*Would Stan think he liked him?*

Bill was pretty sure at this point that Stan must have some sort of non-platonic feelings towards him. The way he repeated "I love you," over and over and over again, that couldn't have just been the alcohol. He was suddenly overcome with guilt. He didn't want to upset Stan, but he didn't want to *date* him either.

Thoughts rushed around in Bill's head so fast that he felt dizzy (or maybe he was still drunk).

He side-eyed Stan, who was lost in thoughts of his own, and felt as if someone had stuck a pin in his heart.

He decided to deal with it in the morning.

Richie had had to carry Eddie, bridal-style, up the stairs of his house. He had been sure to stay quiet, knowing that he wouldn't be able to explain himself if Eddie's mother had woken up and seen them.

He dropped Eddie gently down on his bed and had to wrestle his arms from around his neck.

"Stay," Eddie whined, making grabby hands towards him.

Richie smirked and walked around to the other side of the bed, figuring it was easier to just do what Eddie said, and then go back and pick up the others when he was asleep. He laid down on the bed and wrapped his arms around Eddie, and pressed his face into his hair.

“Sing me something.” Eddie yawned, curling up tighter against Richie.

*Maybe I'm wrong*

*Won't you tell me if I'm coming on too strong*

*This heart of mine has been hurt before*

Eddie fell asleep once again, snoring ever so softly.

*This time I wanna be sure*

Richie slowly detached himself from Eddie and snuck away, holding his breath as he passed his mother's room, and headed back to Betty Ripsom's house to drive the rest of his friends home.

That night, after everyone was home, Richie lied on the hood of his truck, staring up at the stars, wide awake, remembering how Eddie had said “I love you,” and imagined what it would be like when he told him for real.

## 6. Birdwatching and vanilla ice cream

### Summary for the Chapter:

sorry lol

Also thanks for over 100 kudos?? Y'all floor me

The next day, everyone awoke in their own beds (or in Richie's case, the back seat of his truck), all hungover in one way or another, either from alcohol or emotion, or both. Ben was decidedly worse off than the rest of them, having had to rush to the bathroom at three in the morning to puke.

Bill had never felt worse. Knowing that he had probably just ended his friendship with Stan, someone he had known and loved and trusted, and who had trusted him, since they were kids. Knowing that they would have to talk, and it would be so hard and he would be stuttering so bad, and he would probably cry. And if Stan cried, *fuck*, he wouldn't be able to handle that. So he had lied there all night, counting the seconds, hoping that hey, maybe the sun would explode, or maybe he would succumb to some illness he didn't know he had, or maybe the floor beneath him would open up and swallow him whole, all of these things sounding so much better than talking to his best friend the next day.

*Straight boys don't make out with other boys.*

He couldn't get that particular thought out of his head. It felt so constricting, so uncomfortable. He had no idea what to do about it.

*Straight boys don't make out with other boys.*

But he was straight. He was sure of it. It had been one of the only constants in his life, up until the night before.

*But straight boys don't make out with other boys.*

The sun came up all too fast. Soon he could hear his family

downstairs, Georgie switching on the television to watch morning cartoons, his mother idly humming as she cooked, the smell of bacon and eggs slowly sifting up to his room. Stan would undoubtedly be knocking on his front door within the hour.

Stan had gotten up before sunrise to go for a walk, deciding that he needed the fresh air after a very restless night. He had grabbed his birdwatching handbook and binoculars before he left the house. Birdwatching was something he used to do a lot when he was younger, whenever he wasn't with his friends or filling his religious obligations you could usually find him sat on a park bench, binoculars fixed on a birdbath or a specific tree. He had had a lot less time for it lately, but he still indulged himself when the rare opportunity occurred. When he was younger he could have named every bird as soon as he saw it and spell it correctly back to front, but that information had since been replaced with more important things, and he was much slower to recognise anything. It didn't bother him too much, really. He still enjoyed himself very much.

But he wasn't thinking much about birds as he walked down the street.

He was thinking about Bill.

His feelings were so muddled about the night before. He couldn't really remember any specific details, and what he did recall were broken up in fragments that didn't make sense when he put them together.

*The feeling of Bill's arms around his shoulders in the living room. Of Bill's breath, hot on his skin. Bill moaning softly as Stan dug his fingers into his waist. Bill's tongue in his mouth.* He felt his face heating up.

It was everything he wanted, right? Yes, he liked Bill, he wanted to be with Bill, and that's what he got. He should be happy, right?

*But it feels so wrong.*

He had wanted to be with Bill, eventually, but not like that. Not so drunk they couldn't see straight. Not locked in someone else's

bathroom covered in each other's drool, barely remembering any of it the next day.

He figured he should go talk to Bill about it, but what would he even say?

*'Hey babe, had a super fun time eating your face last night but I think it was a mistake and I wish it never happened!'*

He shook his head. *It'll be fine!* It was *Bill*, for god sakes, they trusted each other enough to talk about this.

*Everything will be fine.*

Bill dragged himself out of bed at 7.38am, figuring he would *have* to get up sooner or later, and he didn't really want his parents coming into his room to wake him.

He stumbled his way to the bathroom, rubbing sleep out of his eyes.

He nearly screamed when he saw his reflection.

The left side of his neck was littered with hickeys. Big, blueish-purple marks all the way from his collarbone to his jawline.

"Oh fuck," he said, leaning in closer to the mirror to get a better look, "motherf-fucker."

There was a knock at the door, and he jumped.

"You okay in there Billy? Heard you swearing."

Georgie.

"Y-yeah, George, I'm fine," he called out, "just d-dropped something."

"Mkay!"

Bill went back to inspecting the lovebites Stan had gifted him.

*Fuck.*



He knew that if his parents saw they would *not* be happy. And he knew that if any of his friends saw, they wouldn't let him live it down.

*FUCK.*

He searched his brain for a resolution, something, *anything*.

It was far too hot out to hide it up with a scarf, so that was out.

Maybe he could cover it with something?

He opened the mirror cabinet, knowing his mother kept some of her makeup in here somewhere. He rummaged around the shelves until he found a small tube labelled 'foundation'.

*Here goes nothing.*

He squeezed a far too generous amount into his palm and awkwardly rubbed it onto the side of his neck, and after he worked at it for a minute he decided that it was good enough, nowhere near perfect (it was too dark for his skin tone and you could still see the bruises coming through if you looked close enough), but enough to get away with it as long as he didn't draw attention.

He replaced the tube back in the cabinet, and cleaned up what had dripped onto the sink.

Stan had cut his birdwatching endeavour short, only staying in the park for half an hour or so before the lack of actual birds started to frustrate him and he left. He decided to take the long way around to Bill's, figuring that it was a nice enough morning, and the extra time he would have to think couldn't do much harm.

He could hear birds chirping in the trees around him as he walked, which irritated him slightly because *where were the little bastards when he was looking for them earlier, huh?* But it was still a sound he found soothing, and it helped calm his nerves, if only a little.

Somehow the walk that should have taken twenty minutes seemed to

only take three, and before he knew it he was standing on Bill's front porch.

He straightened himself up and knocked on the door. He heard excited footsteps approaching him and soon enough Georgie was standing in front of him, flashing a toothy grin.

“Hey Georgie, is Bill here?”

“He's upstairs, I'll take you to him!”

Before Stan could refuse, Georgie had taken him by the hand and was leading him up the stairs, bounding up them two steps at a time. Stan just followed and laughed.

They stopped in front of Bill's room, and Stan braced himself before opening the door.

A few minutes later they were sitting under the tree in Bill's backyard, they didn't stay in his room as they didn't want to risk his parents overhearing anything or walking in while they talked.

“L-l-look, S-stan, I th-th-th- ab-b-b-bout l-l-” Bill was getting frustrated, it showed on his face, and he dug his fingernails into his palms. Stan just listened patiently, nodding gently, letting him know to continue.

“L-l-last n-nuh-night, it wh-was,” he could feel tears forming behind his eyes, a dry lump in the back of his throat.

*Just talk, talk like a normal person for once, fucking hell.*

“It w-w-was, was a m-m-m-muh, *fuck*,” his tongue just refused to do what he wanted, he could feel his hands trembling, his eyes blinking rapidly to stop himself from crying.

“It was a mistake,” Stan finished his sentence for him, “yeah, I know.”

Bill stared at him, feeling confused and *angry* and relieved all at once.

He broke down, collapsing into Stan's chest, and just sobbed until the tight pain in his chest disappeared. Stan held him the whole time, not saying anything, not crying, not being able to pinpoint any particular emotion. He felt *blank*. There was no other way to describe it. He felt as if all of his feelings, good or bad, had just left his body, leaving an empty shell. Maybe they would return, maybe they wouldn't. He didn't know. Maybe they had left him and fallen into Bill somehow.

So he held his friend on his lap, unable to cry, or speak, or feel anything.

Eventually Bill stopped crying, stood himself up, gave Stan a weak smile, and headed inside, making sure he avoided his parents and brother as he went to his room.

Neither one had said what they really wanted to say. In a weird way, they were both glad they didn't. As it was, they could just spend a few days apart, and then they would be able to continue as if nothing happened. Their friends wouldn't ever need to find out. They wouldn't fight. They could just shake it off and pretend it didn't mean anything.

They didn't need to make it worse by talking about it.

That afternoon, Richie had met up with Beverly in town, and they had sat on the curb outside of the ice-creamery (Bev got vanilla and Richie got strawberry), talking about everything and nothing at all. Eddie, Mike, and Ben were all invited but turned the offer down, Mike and Ben had gone to the library together and Eddie was staying home to help Mrs. Kaspbrak clean up the house a little. So they were alone, and they both rather appreciated that fact.

"You and Eddie seem to be going pretty well," Bev said, ever so casually, after finishing off the last bite of her cone.

"Yeah, well, I dunno about that."

"Really? You looked pretty comfortable with each other a few nights ago."

“That was before I told him I was leaving.”

Bev's smile faded from her face.

“Leaving?”

“Bev, you know I can't stay here. I love you guys but-” She was glaring at him now.

“But *what*, Richie?”

He shook his head. “I just... it's like I've spent my entire life in this cage, just wishing to be able to get up and go, and live the way I want to, and now I can, Bev. And I did, I left home in the middle of the night and just drove, and it's the best feeling in the world. And I need my life to be like that, Bev. Derry's just another cage. And maybe it's much better than my old one, the bars are wider apart and I've got other's to share it with. But it's still a cage.”

Beverly had to stop herself from slapping him in the face.

“This isn't fucking Dead Poet's Society, Richie! You can't just scream 'cease the day' and go live out of your fucking car!” The outburst was making a few people on the street turn their heads. Richie was in a mild state of shock. “I actually can't believe you right now, Tozier.”

“Bev-”

“What do you think is even out there for you, dude? It's like, we're all here, and we care about you, and we will help you, but you still don't think that's good enough?”

“Bev, please-”

“You don't think I'm good enough? Or Bill? Or *Eddie*, for god's sake?”

“Beverly.”

“Because I have known that kid for *years* and he has never, *ever*, opened himself up to someone the way he has with you. He was looking at you last night like you were the whole goddamn world. And if you fuck that up, I swear I'll-”

“BEV.”

“WHAT?”

Beverly fell silent, breathing heavily, eyes still angrily and somewhat desperately fixated on Richie.

Richie had plenty of things he wanted to say right then.

*If I don't leave now, I'll never be happy.*

*If I don't leave now, you're all going to get sick of me.*

*If I don't leave now, I'll never want to go.*

*If I don't leave now, Eddie will realise how fucking messed up I am.*

He said nothing.

“You know what, Richie? Fine. Go. If you don't want to stay then don't.”

She stood up and looked down at him, scowling.

“But don't call in seven years and ask to come back.”

And with that she stormed off, leaving Richie feeling wounded on the side of the road.

“What the f-fuck do you mean you're l-leaving?”

The seven of them were standing in Bill's front yard, all looking with differing expressions towards Richie, who was nonchalantly leaning against his truck, cigarette hanging out of his mouth, appearing much more relaxed than he actually was.

“I mean I'm leaving. Hitting the road. Saying sayonara. Adios. So

*long, fair well, auf Wiedersehen good night.* Thanks for the accommodation Big Bill, hopefully I'll see you round the way sometime."

Eddie couldn't understand what he was hearing. He felt helpless, unable to do anything. It was a bad dream, surely. Surely he wasn't really going, that it was all a joke. He would get in his truck and wave goodbye only to drive around the block and reappear yelling 'SIKE!' or something stupid, and they would roll their eyes and he would laugh and he would stay.

They still needed time.

They still needed to work things out.

He knew he didn't love Richie yet, but if he left he would never get to find out if he would.

Eddie felt panic set in, his breathing becoming shallower, his body completely frozen. He couldn't move. He couldn't speak. All he could do was watch as Richie started to walk towards Bill, saying what might be his last goodbye.

Richie walked around to each of them individually, exchanging parting words and hugs.

"Bill, say goodbye to ol' Georgie for me. I wish I coulda seen him again."

"Stan the man! You bloomin' legend! Stay gorgeous, babe."

"T'was a pleasure Hanscom, just wish it hadn't been so short-lived."

"Mikey, my boy, keep keeping 'em in line, champ."

Beverly had been avoiding eye contact with him through the whole affair.

"Miss Marsh," he said, sounding as genuine as he could, keeping his

voice low so the others wouldn't overhear, "I would say sorry, but I know it wouldn't be enough." Bev finally met his eye, and he could see the utter distraught in her face before she wrapped her arms around his neck.

"If you ever find that you've forgiven me, I pray you'll call."

Beverly kissed him on the cheek before letting him go.

And then Richie turned to Eddie, who had watched him the whole time, trying not to blink, trying not to hyperventilate.

Richie stood close enough that he was all Eddie could see.

"Don't leave now. You said two weeks." Eddie whimpered.

Richie pulled him into a tight hug, resting his chin on the top of his head.

"Perhaps in another lifetime, love."

"Please stay."

Richie pulled away, only slightly, and tilted Eddie's chin up with one finger.

Then, Richie whispered something into his ear. To everyone else, due to the angle, it looked like a kiss. And maybe that would have been better. A bittersweet reminder of what could have been.

And with that, Richie Tozier got into the driver's seat of his dirty, maroon, pick-up truck, waved at them one last time, and drove away. The next ten seconds were the longest ten seconds Eddie had ever experienced. As the rest of them watched the truck's taillights get further and further away, he stared at the ground. Suddenly he saw his whole future split in two. One half where Richie drove away into the night, never to be seen again. He would go back to his house, his mother would scold him for being out at night without a jacket. He would go to sleep and wake up and Richie would be in some other town. And Eddie would see his friends every day until eventually

they moved or drifted apart as friends often did. He would leave his mother's house in a few years and have a place of his own, and he may even fall in love with someone else, get married, live a good, content, happy little life. And there would be days when he thought about Richie and there would be days when he didn't. And there would be days when Richie was just a foggy memory, possibly a dream, a good dream, but with out any reason to believe it was real. And Richie would do much the same or maybe he would just drive until it killed him.

And then the was the other half.

The half that scared him nearly to death.

*Every single atom in his body was telling him to stay where he was. Just stand there, just watch him drive away. Don't do anything stupid. Dear god, don't do anything stupid. He's gone. He's gone and you can't change that. Don't do anything stupid. What would your mother do? What would your friends do? What would you d o? DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID.*

*"The offer still stands, you know."*

Eddie's feet hit the pavement before he even knew what he was doing.

He sprinted as fast as he could possibly go, chasing after the truck, chasing after Richie. He could hear his friend's calling out his name, telling him to stop, what the hell are you doing?

He just ran faster, faster than he had ever run before, smiling and laughing the whole time, so weightless and euphoric that he felt he might start flying.

Richie had turned the radio all the way up, trying to drown out his thoughts. He had used all of his strength trying not to cry in front of the others, so as soon as he was out of their line of sight he just bawled, ugly, fat tears pouring down his cheeks, his glasses fogging



up so much that he had to pull over.

He didn't notice Eddie sprinting to his car. In fact he didn't notice Eddie until he had already climbed into the passenger side seat, red-faced and drenched in sweat, panting and wheezing, looking like he had just finished a marathon.

“Ed, what are you-” he didn't have time to finish sniffing his way through his sentence before Eddie kissed him, probably the grossest kiss ever between all the snot and sweat and the fact that Eddie could barely breath and Richie was still uncontrollably sobbing, but in the moment they swore it was the best kiss that either of them had ever had.

Eddie had to use his inhaler a few times after they pulled apart, and Richie went to work drying his own face with the sleeves of his jacket.

Soon they could see Beverly, Bill, Stan, Mike, and Ben approaching quickly through the rearview mirror.

“Drive,” Eddie said, turning to Richie with wide eyes and a slightly crazed look on his face.

“Ed-” “God damn it just drive!”

Richie quickly started the car and speeded away, until they couldn't see them anymore.

“Where are we going, love?” he asked, glancing over at Eddie who was smiling wider than ever, looking *insane* but still so fucking beautiful.

“Wherever the road takes us,”

## 7. Best Hotcakes In The World

### Summary for the Chapter:

i feel bad for all the sadness so heres a more lighthearted chapter but it's still angsty because i cant write anything else lmao ciao babes thanks for the support xx

There's just something so incredibly calming about driving down a highway late at night. No other cars on the road, completely silent if it weren't for the slow song playing on the radio, thinly blanketed in static, the stars appearing so bright without any buildings or streetlights to interfere, the moon so full and iridescent, seeming to follow you out the window as you drive. The calmness that this can make you feel is nearly unmatched.

Eddie eventually drifted off into one of the most peaceful sleeps he's ever had, head leaning against the window and arms crossed over his chest, the ghost of a smile still on his face. Richie drove through the night, knowing he needed to make this moment last as long as he can, hoping that this feeling, this glorious calmness, could last forever. And as he drove, he genuinely started to believe that maybe, just maybe, it really could.

He pulled into a gas station just as the first hints of sunrise started to show over the horizon. He topped up the tank, the hazy buzzing from the neon lights overhead filling his ears, making him suddenly aware of how tired he was.

He paid the cashier who, as far as he could tell, had been working non-stop for the last 48 hours, and was on the verge of death from exhaustion, and headed back to the truck with two coffee cups in hand.

Eddie came to just as they hit the road again, seeming a little confused as to where he was for a moment, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“Where are we?” he yawned. Richie shrugged”

“Well, we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto, I'll tell you that much,” he picked up one of the coffees from the cup holder, holding it out towards Eddie. “Here, sorry it's just black, I didn't know how you liked it.”

Eddie closed both hands around the cup, holding it close up to his face so he could feel the warmth coming from it.

He shuddered when he took a sip.

“Ugh that's awful, what's in yours?” Eddie had grabbed Richie's cup out of his hand before he could do anything about it and replacing it with his own.

“Mmh, better, I'll have this one.”

Richie let out a shocked laugh. “Did you just take my fucking coffee?”

“You made mine really shitty! No one likes black coffee!”

Richie took a sip of the coffee now in his hand and screwed up his face.

“Oh, god, that's bad. I want mine back,” he tried, but Eddie shook his head, giggling. Richie put his cup down and tried to grab at Eddie's, while still trying to focus on not crashing the car. Eddie squealed and turned his body in the seat so Richie couldn't take it from him.

Richie slumped back in his seat, pouting and sighing dramatically.

“You're really pushy in the morning, you know?” he said, trying to look upset but failing to do so, and eventually cracked a smile.

“You love it, though,” Eddie replied, relishing in his own victory with a smug look on his face.

'Yeah, I do,' he thought. “You want breakfast? I know a place that does the best hotcakes.”

“I thought you didn't know where we were?”

Richie just grinned and winked at him, and kept driving.

By now the sky had transitioned from the dark, starry blue of night to the vibrant orange of dawn, the clouds reflecting pinks and reds and purples, the trees and the hills around them only silhouettes against the brilliant hues. It seemed almost like it was just for them, that the world was presenting them with their own personal light show, one that far outranked anything that humans could achieve.

And then it was over, the sun rose higher and the sky turned a content shade of blue, and it was nice, it was content, and familiar, but it wasn't breathtaking.

About an hour later they pulled up in the near empty parking lot of a rather outdated roadside diner.

It seemed quite out of place, there had been nothing for miles and then suddenly, this, just like a mirage you would see in the desert, surreal and almost dreamlike. Eddie felt it might disappear at any moment.

But Richie pushed open the door and the place came to life, and they could hear the sounds of idle chatter between patrons, Bowie playing on the jukebox, delicious smells wafting from the kitchen behind the counter.

They sat down at an empty booth across from each other, and when the waitress glided over to ask what they wanted they both ordered coffee and a plate of hotcakes.

"Can I just ask, babe, when you said 'best hotcakes in the world,' did you really mean 'most slightly below average hotcakes in the world'? Because if not, then I really don't know what to tell you."

They were about halfway through their meal, Richie on his second coffee, Eddie feeling rather unsatisfied in whole about the food. He had decided after the first bite that drowning it in maple syrup might make it more appealing, and had soon regretted that choice,

because now it was sticky and way too sweet and still kinda gross. Richie didn't seem to mind the taste.

“Oh yeah, I totally lied. I've never eaten here before in my life.”

“How did you even know it was here then?”

Richie shrugged. “Took a guess. Knew we would come across something eventually.”

Eddie looked slightly bewildered.

“So that's how you live then? Just making blind guesses and hoping it's right without having any idea?”

“It's worked for me so far,” Richie smirked, and then shovelled another forkful of food into his mouth. Eddie was disgusted, but couldn't help himself from smiling.

Back in Derry, their friends were still gathered at Bill's house, in his room, having waited up all night for the phone to ring. They had already had to cover their asses with Mrs. Kaspbrak, Stan calling to say that Eddie was staying the night at his house, and it had worked out okay, she was rather fond of Stan because he was clean and polite and quiet and offered to wash up whenever he came over for dinner, but they all knew she would be suspicious if he was away for another night.

When the phone rang they all jumped and lunged for it. Beverly managed to snatch it and held it up to her ear, the rest of them crowding around trying to hear.

“Eddie? Eddie is that you?”

“Yeah, it's me Bev.”

Bev breathed a sigh of relief, then her tone switched from desperate to stern.

“Eddie what the actual fuck are you doing? Where are you?”

Eddie was standing at a public payphone outside of the diner, with Richie sitting on the hood of his truck, listening intently.

"I'm fine, we're at some restaurant on the interstate."

Mike grabbed the phone from her.

"Hey Ed, how's life on the road treating you?" Bill promptly whacked him over the back of the head and took the phone.

"Eddie, p-put Richie on."

Eddie held the phone out to Richie and he slid off his truck and half-jogged over.

"Hello this is Mr Tozier, whom may I ask is calling?"

"RICHIE, YOU F-F-FUCKING IDIOT."

Beverly yanked the phone back.

"Richie, you need to drive him back here right now, this is ridiculous."

"What are they saying?" Eddie asked. Richie covered the receiver with his hand.

"They're saying I should bring you back home." Eddie gestured for him to hand the phone back.

"Guys, he didn't kidnap me, for fuck's sake, I left."

“Eddie you're not thinking. What about your mother? Are we supposed to just tell her that you're sleeping over every night?”

Eddie shrugged his shoulders.

“I'll call her, tell her the truth.”

“She would have the fucking police tracking you down, and you know it!”

Stan grabbed the phone.

“Eddie, seriously think about this, okay? You're out there with no clothes and no medication and no money. How do you think this is going to turn out?”

“We'll make do.”

“EDDIE.”

Beverly took the phone back, annoyed at the fact it kept getting ripped out of her hands, and stood up so no one else could.

“Eddie, is this really what you want to do?”

Eddie paused.

Did he?

He had been so caught up in the thrill of it all, of doing something spontaneous and exciting, that he hadn't really taken the time to think. The whole ordeal was outrageous, that was obvious. It was so unlike him. He had always prided himself of considering every consequence of a situation, of being cautious and clean and routined. And sure, he had loosened up a little since he was younger. Things that used to scare him half to death, public bathrooms, large dogs, mud, (basically anything that would bring germs), were now less of a

phobia and more of an inconvenience, he would still avoid them if he could but if he couldn't, then he managed.

And now, all of a sudden, here's this stranger who he held hands with, even with no evidence he had washed them recently, with a dirty truck that he rode in and slept in without ever feeling the urge to vacuum it first. A stranger who he kissed, and put his hands through his hair, and who sang to him and gave him botched dining recommendations. And who he ran away with after knowing him for four days, like in some bad romance novel.

Did he really want to do this?

But then Eddie looked up at Richie.

Richie, with his thick-frame glasses and untamed hair and a constant playful smirk on his face, lanky and ghostly pale, with dark circles under his eyes and a voice that could lull anyone to sleep. Richie, who he had been willing to drop everything and leave for in the blink of an eye.

“Yeah, it is.”

Richie's eyes lit up as the words left his lips.

Beverly closed her eyes.

“Okay.”

Everyone else in the room freaked.

“Beverly, what the fuck! He needs to come back!” Stan said, pulling at his own hair in frustration. Beverly ignored them and kept talking.

“Eddie, if you're ever in trouble you need to promise that you'll call us, okay? And- and we'll come get you, no matter where you are, got that? Do you promise?”

“I promise, Bev.”



“Put Richie on.”

There was a shuffling sound as the phone was handed over.

“Hello?”

“Richie, I need you to listen, got it?”

“I'm listening.”

“If you do anything at all that puts him in more danger than you already have, I'll never forgive you for it. He's going to want to go along with everything you say and do, so don't do anything stupid. And the second that he says he wants to come back home, you turn that fucking truck around and you bring him right back, you hear me? No fucking excuses.”

“Yes, ma'am. Understood.”

“Don't fuck this up, Tozier.”

She hung up, the four boys staring in stunned silence as she put the phone down.

“S-s-so what, you j-just let him g-g-go?”

“He's not a kid, Bill. If he wants to go then there's nothing we can do.”

“It's Eddie, for crying out loud! This Tozier's got him acting like a moron!”

“So he'll realise that on his own, Ben. Guys, we know he's not an idiot. He's just acting on a high, and soon he'll come down and he'll be back home.”

“And you trust Richie?” Stan asked.

“Yes,” she said, tilting her chin up just slightly, “I trust him. And yeah, if he messes up then I'll beat the ever-loving shit out of him, but still, I would trust him with my own life and I trust him with Eddie.”

The others seemed to backdown after this. She had the tendency to be right about a lot of these sorts of things, so if it was okay with her, it was okay with the rest of them.

Richie had walked off somewhere to smoke as Eddie dialled his mother's number.

“Hi ma. Yes, I'm fine. No, nothing's wrong, I'm- look ma, I've – No. I'm fine. It's just that I'm not gonna be home for a while- I can't tell you where I- Yes I'm safe- No. No. Yes. Ma it's fi- I'm just gonna be away! It's fine- I don't know. Yes. Yes. Yes! Mommy please- I promise I'm not- No I haven't been abducted – You don't know him, ma- yes. No- I swear – Ye- ma!”

This went on for some time.

It took nearly twenty minutes, and several quarters, but by some miracle he managed to convince her that he was genuinely okay, and she didn't need to call in a SWAT team to come rescue him from some drug-lord's caravan in the middle of the desert.

“Bye ma, I love you – Yes I'll call – I promise. Okay – love you, bye.”

He hung up the phone with a huff.

“We in the clear, love?”

Two arms wrapped around Eddie's waist, and he could feel Richie's breath on the back of his neck.

“Mm, I think so. But maybe keep an eye out for any search helicopters.” He felt Richie's chest rising and falling against his back, and he spun around to wrap his own arms around his neck.

Richie leant in to kiss him but stopped when he saw people glaring at them through the diner windows, and suddenly felt overwhelmingly unsafe.

“Not here, babe.” his voice turned to stone. Eddie tried to turn and see why, only catching a glimpse at the door starting to open, and the

waitress that had served them only half an hour earlier with an unexplainably terrifying expression, and he knew instantly it was intended for them.

They separated and walked to the truck, feeling the eyes of the patrons inside burning through them like red hot iron. It was a jarring reality check for the both of them. Before, they had been blissfully oblivious, stuck in this perfect snow-globe they had built around themselves. But now there was a chip in the glass, and it was small, and they could ignore it for now, but it was still there. And chips tend to lead to cracks.

While what happened made him feel shaken, it had an effect on Richie that Eddie couldn't quite place. Back on the road he seemed to return to normal, singing along to the radio and drumming his fingers on the steering wheel just as he had before, but there was something wrong now. His eyes moved too quickly, his smile just a little too big to be genuine, his hands quivering, so slight that it was almost unnoticeable, but Eddie saw it, and the sight anchored itself in the pit of his stomach.

They didn't stop again until nightfall. Richie pulled over on the side of the road, next to a fence around a field with knee-high grass. The air was hot and dense, so they decided they would try to sleep in the cargo tray. Richie grabbed a thick blanket he had stored under the passenger seat and laid it out on the back of the truck, then helped Eddie up. It was warm enough that they didn't really need anything to cover them, so they just lied down, Eddie resting his head on Richie's arm, their legs entangled with one another's, looking up at a diamond-studded sky that seemed to go on forever.

"Are you okay?" Eddie asked timidly after about ten minutes of quiet between them.

"I'm fine," he replied, "why?"

"It's just – you know what other people think doesn't matter, right?"

Like, about this? About us?"

"I know," Richie spoke slowly and uneasily, though he tried his best to hide it, "I know, it's just, I think I forgot about that stuff, you know? I forgot that most people don't understand this, us, and then, back there, it's like it came flying back in my face and I wasn't prepared for it. And it scared the shit out of me, Eds."

Eddie nodded and buried his face into Richie's chest. His shirt smelt like mediocre hotcakes and cigarettes, and Eddie realised that should have disgusted him, but it didn't.

"You okay?"

Eddie hummed a short note of agreement and closed his eyes.

Richie kissed the top of his head and closed his own.

"Babe?" Eddie yawned, seconds away from falling asleep.

"Yeah?"

"Don't call me Eds."

Richie stifled a laugh and pulled him in tighter.

"Whatever you say, love."

## 8. Blanket Fort

### Summary for the Chapter:

i wanna do more with ben and mike :((  
also all your comments literally give me life pls keep  
validating me thx <33333

A week passed, and none of them had heard from Eddie or Richie.

“He's dead isn't he? Richie fucking killed him. He's out there, lying in a ditch somewhere, with fucking maggots eating his eyeballs.”

They were all out at the Barrens, finally getting some fresh air after days of not leaving their houses, not wanting to risk a missed phone call.

They were all worried, of course, but Stan seemed to be the one most willing to show it. He had been pacing back and forth basically since they arrived, shaking hands held behind his back.

“Does no one else care? Eddie's been murdered! And we just let him go like a bunch of sociopaths!”

“Shut it Stan, he's not dead.” Beverly was standing by the water's edge, attempting to skip rocks but failing. Bill was sitting beside her, watching Stan out of the corner of his eye but making sure not to make eye contact. They hadn't actually spoken to each other since the day after Betty Ripsom's party, not that anyone in the group had noticed. “We've known Richie for years, remember? He's our friend, he wouldn't murder Eddie.”

“I dunno, didn't he move away for like ten years? That's a long time, he could have become a murderer.” Ben said, pulling up blades of grass and flicking them at Mike. Bev glared at him.

“Oh my god. He's right. Richie planned this. He only came back because he was looking for someone to murder, and we just handed him a victim. Fucking hell, guys what do we do?”

“Stan, Jesus Christ,” Bev walked over to him and grabbed his

shoulders so he stopped pacing, "Eddie's fine."

"How would you know?" Stan was almost panicked to the point of crying. His eyes were wild and his hair was dishevelled from running his hands through it too much. He looked like he hadn't slept all week (and maybe he hadn't, he sure had plenty of things going through his mind that would keep him awake).

To be completely honest, Beverly didn't know. Not hearing from them had her immensely worried, and in the back of her mind she couldn't help but think the worst, that maybe they were dead or hurt or they had broken down in the middle of nowhere, miles away from any help. But she kept her composure. It wouldn't do any good if they were all freaking out over this, so she forced herself to be the voice of reason. And she truly did trust Richie, he had been her closest friend all those years ago.

"Look, this is *Trashmouth Tozier* we're talking about, remember? He's not going to hurt Eddie, unless you can die by annoyance, god forbid." Stan smiled for a second at that, but only for a second. She reached up to put her hand on his cheek. "He's okay, Stan. I promise you."

Stan leant into her touch, putting his own hand on top of hers, feeling significantly calmer than before. She grinned at him and went back to sit next to Bill.

They all stayed out for the majority of the day, and as always they stayed relatively grouped together, at least making sure they were within eyesight of each other. But Beverly and Bill had seemed oddly removed from the others, always sitting a bit away from them, just far enough that they could talk between themselves without anyone hearing.

Stan tried not to make it obvious that he noticed, but he wasn't particularly good at subtlety, and Mike confronted him after catching his staring for the umpteenth time.

“Dude, what's up with you? You're so out of it today.”

He was sitting cross-legged with his elbows resting on his knees and one hand holding his head up, frowning as he watched Bill and Bev having a conversation that he couldn't hear on the other side of the stream.

“What?” he turned his head towards Mike, Ben lying down next to him with his head in his lap. “Nothing. I'm fine. I'm not staring.”

“Really? Because I'm pretty sure you haven't listened to a thing we've been saying for the last twenty minutes,” Ben sounded more worried than annoyed (but he still sounded a little annoyed), “and you're either staring at those two or there's a very interesting bird over there that we can't see.”

“Sure I have, you're talking about, uh, that History thing. In the library. The book with the history in it. And like I said, I'm not staring at anything.”

“We were actually talking about the new Star Trek episode, but nice try.”

“Oh, well I haven't watched it yet.”

Stan started fidgeting with a loose string on his jeans. Ben and Mike looked at each other, then back at him.

“Seriously, what's wrong?”

“Nothings wrong! Maybe I'm just, I don't know, a bit worked up about Eddie, but I'm fine!” Stan laughed nervously, eyes darting between them. Ben sat up so he was properly facing him.

“Stan, you now you can tell us anything, right?”

Stan threw his head back in an exaggerated groan.

“For the last time, there's nothing to say! Nothing is wrong! I feel great, actually, never been better.” He put on a fake smile that made him look more sick than anything else. “So we're dropping this, okay? What were you talking about before? Star Wars? Let's keep talking about that.”

“Star Trek, Stan.”

“Whatever.”

“Okay, well, we were talking about how in the new episode there was this...”

Stan sat, watching Mike's mouth move, but not hearing any of the words he was saying. His impulse control quickly ran out, and he glanced at Bill and Beverly again. They were sitting with their knees touching. Bev was smiling and giggling at Bill as he talked, fluttering her eyelashes at him. Stan scowled in disgust.

“And then Riker was like- are you *fucking* serious Stanley?!”

Stan snapped back to him, startled. “What? I didn't do anything!”

“You can't pay attention for three goddamn seconds, dude! You're obviously hiding something.”

“I told you a million times, nothing is-”

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Bill lean forward to move a hair out of Bev's face. As his hand lingered over her cheek, Stan felt like he might faint.

“You know what, I'm actually feeling kind of sick.” He held his hand to his stomach and scrunched up his face in a poor acting attempt. “I'm gonna go home. I shouldn't have come out today, anyways. Might have missed a call from Eddie.”

He marched past them to where they had left their bikes and picked up his own, flipping up the kickstand with his foot.

“Stan, you leaving already?” Beverly called out as he stormed past them, but he either didn't hear or he ignored her.

When he reached the road he got on his bike and pedalled as hard as he could, angry tears stinging his eyes.

“H-he's probably just s-still upset over e-Eds.” Bill said as she watched



him ride away.

“Maybe you should go check on him later, make sure he's doing okay?”

Bill's breath hitched in his throat.

“I'm sh-sh-sure he'll be fine.”

Bev frowned at him.

“Bill, he's your best friend.”

“W-well, he's *one* of my b-best friends. You're a-all my best friends.”

Bev hit his shoulder playfully.

“Oh come on, we all know you like Stan the most,” one corner of her mouth tilted up, confused by his sudden defensiveness, “it's okay to play favourites, no one's gonna get butt-hurt over it.”

Bill's face turned a hot shade of pink.

“I-I-I d-don't play f-favourites. I d-don't like him a-an-anymore than I l-like – fuck – I d-don't – I don't h-h-h-ha-hav- sh-sh-shh-shit!” He buried his face in his hands. “C-can we s-stop talking about s-s-Stan for f-fuck's sake.”

He felt Bev put a hand on his shoulder, rubbing her thumb in circles just above his shoulder blade.

“Did something happen? Between you two?”

“N-no. Yes. I-I don't w-want to talk ab-abuh-about it.”

She wanted to ask another question, but the wavering in his voice made her stay quiet. Eventually he lifted his head, red imprints left behind where his hands had been.

“All okay?” she asked. Bill nodded.

“H-hey, I'm supposed t-to be babys-sitting Georgie tonight, c-can you come over?”

*He usually asks Stan*, she thought. “Yeah, I should be good to go.”

“Cool,” he flashed her a grin and looked over at Ben and Mike, who were now back to bombarding each other with ripped up plants. Ben copped a fistful of dirt in the eye and fell backwards, groaning in pain but still laughing.

An hour after sundown, Beverly arrived at Bill's house, and didn't bother to knock before entering. They all knew they didn't really have to knock unless someone's parents were home.

She walked into the living room to find Georgie beating Bill at a game of Battleship.

“What's the score, boys?” she teased, sitting down on the couch besides Georgie, the coffee table in front of them and Bill sitting on the floor.

“I've won twice already!”

“It's b-because he's ch-cheating,” Bill laughed.

“Aw, come on Bill, don't be a sore loser,” she put an arm around Georgie and pulled him into a side-hug, “this kid's just *naturally gifted*, right George?”

Georgie giggled and nodded proudly. Bill stuck his tongue out at them.

“Is Stan coming?” Georgie asked, looking back towards the front door.

Bev shot a questioning glance at Bill. He swallowed hard.

“H-h-he was b-busy,” he lied.

Georgie pouted, and then went back to studying the board game, tapping his chin as if in deep thought.

“B4?”

“Seriously!? How did you sink me *again!*?” Bill threw his hands up in defeat. “Alright, you win, let’s do something different.”

“Like what?”

Bill looked around the room, searching for inspiration, but nothing caught his attention.

“We could just put on a movie?” Georgie slumped his shoulders at the suggestion. Beverly interrupted before he could complain about how *boring* that would be.

“I have an idea.”

Soon they were up and gathering every sheet and pillow they could find and piling it all in the middle of the living room. Bill had moved the coffee table off to the side, and grabbed the chairs from the dining room to hold the sheets up like a tent, while Georgie and Beverly were laying pillows out over the floor and creating a nook for them to sit in.

They adjusted and moved things around for a while, following Georgie’s instruction on what needed to go where, and when they got his absolute approval they all crawled inside. Georgie sat in between the two of them, admiring the cave they had constructed, and begged Bill to tell a story.

And he did. It was a story about a band of great heroes, who fought against an evil monster. He put on voices and acted out gestures, and when he got stumped Georgie would tell him what happens next, and he would build on from there. He barely stuttered the whole way through.

He never said it, but in Georgie’s mind, he saw the characters as Bill and his friends.

Beverly listened, Georgie leaning up against her, feeling nothing but love in her heart as the words poured from his mouth. She had never heard him like this, so sure of himself, not tripping over his tongue or becoming breathless when the sentences wouldn’t come. She was

awestruck, his voice wrapping itself around her and spreading warmth throughout her body.

By the time the tale had ended, Georgie had lost out his battle against sleep, so Bill carried him upstairs to his room. He had always been smaller than most other kids his age, much shorter than Bill had been at twelve, but as he laid there, curled up on his side under the navy blue duvet, he looked younger than ever. Bill was transported momentarily back in time, when they had been blissfully unaware of the rest of the world, their biggest problems back then would seem like nothing now.

“They're real cute when they're asleep, huh?”

Beverly walked up behind him and put her chin on his shoulder. He let out a soft laugh under his breath.

“It's t-too bad he'll w-wake up.”

She slapped him playfully on the shoulder and leant down to kiss Georgie on the forehead.

Downstairs, Bill made a move to disassemble their construction, but Beverly stopped him.

“Oh come on, we spent like an hour on this thing. May as well keep it up until morning.”

So they crawled back inside and sat in silence for a while, leaning up against each other. Bev though Bill seemed somewhat distracted, like his mind was far off somewhere else.

“What are you thinking about?” she whispered.

“Nothing important.”

“Is it about Stan?”

No response.

“Bill I'm worrie-”

She was cut off by Bill's lips against hers, his face too close to look like anything more than a blur. She could feel a chill running down her spine, suddenly so much more aware of how *quiet* the room was, able to make out her heart pulsing in her ear. But before she could comprehend what was happening, it was over, and Bill was staring at her, searching for some sort of reaction. But she didn't really give one, just stared back, mouth slightly parted, no movement bar her chest slowly rising and falling.

And then he did it again, more intently this time. She tried to kiss back but couldn't seem to figure out how to, every time she would try something it just felt awkward. His lips were cold and weirdly dry, and there was something about they way he was doing it that made it feel too forced, like he didn't really want to but he was doing it anyway.

Beverly had kissed people before, she kissed her friends all the time, but nothing further than a quick peck. And there had of course been junior prom with Brad Haynes, where he had kissed her after driving her home, and it had been wet and sloppy and she shoved him away after a few seconds, patted him on the shoulder and never spoke to him again.

This was different. This was Bill, and he didn't seem to know what he was doing.

She wasn't sure if she really liked him *like that*. Sure, she had thought about it, and there were times when he was giving a long-winded speech or poking his tongue out in concentration as he sketched, where she had found herself thinking about what this moment would be like. But then again, she had also thought that about Ben. And Mike. And even Richie, that one time back when they were kids, but that dream was crushed forever when she saw him drop his sandwich into the dirt and then pick it up and continue to eat it. She had mulled over the idea of what it would be like to kiss all of them. But it was never any serious thought, and in reality, she would have never initiated anything. They were her friends, and she would have

been content with that for the rest of her life.

He kept on, though, even as she didn't kiss him back, awkwardly placing and replacing his hands places, unable to make a decision, *face, waist, shoulder, waist, face, shoulder, knee, waist*, to the point where she had to grab his shoulders and push him away.

“S-s-sorry, did you n-not w-want t-”

“No, it's okay,” she tried to think of something to say that wouldn't offend, “I just- Bill, I don't know if I-”

“Y-you d-don't like m-me.” He looked taken aback. *Surely that had been flirting earlier at the Barrens. Surely she had liked me. I was sure of it.*

“Bill, come on, I-”

“I-I th-thought, w-w-with a-a-all of th-the-”

*I need this to work out, Bev.*

“You're my best friend, and I-”

*I can't do this.*

“-I just don't want to ruin that, if-”

*Straight boys don't-*

“-if I lost you I would never forgive myself-”

*Straight boys-*

“-and I don't know what to do, Bill.”

*Straight-*

He was staring right through her at this point, the words she was saying muffled and unorganised in his head, overpowered by his own thoughts.

“I have to go Bill, I'm sorry.”

And suddenly she wasn't in front of him anymore, though he couldn't recall actually seeing her get up or leave. He felt drunk, like the world was moving a million miles an hour beneath him, but he was frozen in place.

He couldn't bring himself to walk up the stairs to his own bed.

That night he couldn't stop thinking about Stan.

*Straight boys don't.*

*Obviously not.*

## 9. important things like weed, cigarettes, and cash

### Summary for the Chapter:

soz broz

also sorry for the hiatus i was busy procrastinating  
but this chapters a little bit longer than usual so shut  
up

Eddie Kaspbrak had made it one entire week without having a breakdown, and he was pretty damn proud of himself.

If he was honest he thought it would have been maybe three days tops before he came to his senses and made Richie take him back home, but it had been a week. Seven whole days of driving in that god awful hunk of metal, showering at truck stops, and eating gas station junk food. Richie had a duffel bag of clothes stuffed behind the back seat that they cycled through, all of Richie's clothes were a couple sizes too big on Eddie and very unlike his usual attire, all graphic t-shirts and denim jeans, but he found himself liking how he looked in them. (The underwear situation was... interesting, to say the least). Or maybe it was just how Richie looked at him when he put them on, he couldn't tell. Eddie would always fall asleep with the seat reclined to the static chords of the radio and Richie's voice and he would wake up to a bright sunrise and a hot cup of coffee (with milk and sugar, this time). He never saw Richie sleep, but he didn't think to ever question him about it. He didn't think to question him about a lot of things, like why he was living off a slowly depleting wad of cash in a plastic bag hidden in the glovebox, or if he actually knew where the hell they were at any point in time. He didn't think to ask about anything, because it had been the best week of his life.

Never in the seventeen years and ten months he had been alive had he felt so, well, *alive*. And maybe that was due to the adrenaline he got from doing something this rebellious, maybe it was the fact that his mother wasn't lecturing him about everything for once in his goddamn life, maybe his brain was going into overdrive from the nearly all-sugar diet he had been forced to switch to, and maybe it was simply the fresh country air in his lungs when the windows were



rolled down, but god, he felt amazing. And Richie, wow, *Richie*.

Spending an entire week with someone you haven't known for very long, completely alone together, essentially trapped in a confined space, can really only go one of two ways. You will either start to despise them with every inch of your being, and the sound of their voice will irritate you to no end, and after it's over you won't be able to tolerate them ever again. Or, if it goes the other way, you'll start to fall in love with them.

And for Eddie, it was most definitely, unrelentingly, embarrassingly, the latter.

He kept catching himself staring, all starry-eyed and dreamy, at his dark-haired driver, butterflies fluttering around in his stomach, taking in the boy's features both sharp and subtle, entranced by the imperfections in his skin and the cracks in his lips and the curls in his hair (he felt strange when he concentrated on his hair too long, as if it was linked to a hazy drunken memory that he couldn't quite remember no matter how hard he tried), and everything he saw he became infatuated with. Richie's free hand would often end up resting on Eddie's thigh or intertwined with his own over the centre console, and he would melt under the contact every time. And they talked about everything, both understanding there wasn't many boundaries at this point, as far as conversation went. Eddie learnt that Richie had been in an amateur rock band in high school where he played guitar and sang, fittingly called *Trashmouth*, that he always got at least a minor role in the school plays, and that got mostly straight A's, though his ADHD and incessant need to run his mouth gave his teachers a run for their money, and that his parents were the absolute worst and didn't much care for him at all, so he up and ran away in the middle of the night leaving nothing more than a note on the fridge. In return, Eddie told Richie about his mother and her tendency to be extremely overbearing, though to be fair it had died down significantly in the last couple of years due to her discovery of the wonders sleeping pills can do, and how he used to play baseball with Bill, and his mild obsession- er, *crush on* Christian Slater, and how a girl in a pharmacy had once told him that his asthma medication was not exactly *real*.

"She was the pharmacist's daughter, and she said that it was all fake.

A gazebo, I think she said.”

“Wait, what did she say?”

“I know, right! All fake. I didn't know whether to believe her or not because she was kind of a bitch, but-”

“Gazebo.”

“...That's what I said, yes.”

“Do you by any chance mean *placebo*, babe?”

“I- what?”

“Placebo, like fake medication that tricks your brain into thinking it's real. A gazebo's like a tent- podium kinda thing... Eds?”

“I've been lied to.”

And when they weren't talking, Richie was singing, and Eddie appreciated this very much. A particular song would come on and Richie would stop dead in the middle of a sentence to turn up the volume and belt out the lyrics. Sometimes Eddie would sing along, if he happened to know it, but most of the time he would just put his feet up on the dashboard and close his eyes, listening contently. His voice suited him well, a little raspy and rough but still smooth and steady, it sounded like heaven to Eddie. But then again, everything about Richie Tozier seemed like heaven to Eddie.

Richie Tozier had made it one week without having a breakdown, but he felt he wasn't going to last much longer.

It took everything in him to keep it together. The last thing he wanted to do was crack in front of Eddie, because geez, Eddie was something special, and he didn't want to mess this up.

He was so anxious that he had barely slept at all, only pulling over way past midnight when his eyelids felt like they were about to collapse, and then it would only be an hour or so before he woke up

and started driving again, always before sunrise, always while Eddie was still asleep. He didn't want Eddie to know how little he was sleeping, worried it would cause him to panic and feel unsafe that he was being driven by someone so sleep-deprived, so he put an extra shot of espresso in his coffee and powered through. And when he felt like he was too on edge he sang to calm himself down, or he got Eddie talking and he listened to stories and anecdotes that he would recite about his friends during the years he had been gone. This helped to distract him temporarily from his intrusive thoughts but it didn't stop them, they were still there, mocking and so loud that sometime's he wanted to scream.

But he couldn't break down. Not while he wasn't alone.

Beverly's voice was a regular visitor amongst those thoughts, repeating her last words to him over and over again like a broken record, *don't do anything stupid, no fucking excuses, don't fuck this up, i'll never forgive you for it.*

The words, the pressure they put him under that left him feeling nauseous and dizzy, it was driving him crazy. Because he knew he was about to do something fucking stupid.

Eddie woke up in the early hours of the morning, the eight morning since he had left home, and instantly knew something was up.

They first thing he noticed were the streetlights, as he blinked his eyes open and allowed his vision to adjust. There hadn't been streetlights on the highway. He turned his head slightly, only seeing the rooftops from his half-laying position. He sat up slowly, stretching his arms out in front of him. Now he could see the houses under the roofs, most of them looking pretty run down and old fashioned, a paint chipping off wooden tilings and torn-up chain link fences kind of deal.

He adjusted his seat forward as he looked out the window, nose crinkled in confusion.

"Rich, why are we off the highway?" he yawned, finally looking over

at the boy, who he noticed looked especially rough today though he didn't mention it.

"Well good morning to you too, babe," Richie jeered, "and we're just making a short pit stop, then we'll get back to it."

"Pit stop?" Eddie repeated, raising an eyebrow.

"Mhm. Just up here, actually."

The truck slowed to a stop in front of a particularly run down house. Eddie could see beer bottles scattered across the lawn that was more weeds than grass and a torn up fly-screen door. Richie pulled on the handbrake and switched off the ignition.

"Richie, where are we?" Eddie asked cautiously, pretty sure he already knew the answer. Richie took a sharp intake of air and undid his seatbelt, avoiding Eddie's question as he reached for the door handle. Eddie grabbed his shirt sleeve.

"Rich, don't ignore me." His voice was low and stern, and Richie slumped back against the seat, turning to face him.

"We're at my- we're at my parents house. I'm just- I gotta go get a few things," Richie tried to make it sound casual but his his voice was unsteady and he could feel his hands start to shake. "Important things. Ten minutes, in and out. That's all."

Eddie didn't release his grip from Richie's shoulder. Richie swallowed hard.

"I don't know if you should," Eddie's eyes darted between Richie and the house, "It doesn't feel safe. What if your parents-"

"C'mon Eds," Richie took Eddie's hand off his shoulder to hold in his own, "they're probably passed out, they might not even be home. Anyways, I'm used to sneaking around in there," he laughed at the last part but he could see Eddie wince. He moved his free hand to Eddie's cheek and rubbed a circle with his thumb. "Just stay here. I'll be quick, okay?"

He opened the door and jumped out before Eddie could stop him and

started down the driveway of the house.

“Fuck,” Eddie muttered, fumbling to get his seatbelt unclipped. He clambered out onto the pavement just as Richie stepped into the threshold.

The inside of the house was arguably in worse shape than the outside. The faded floral wallpaper was peeling in several places and chipped in many others. Every surface was disorganised and dusty, more empty bottles making up most of the clutter. The carpet was matted and covered in various sizes and colours of stains.

The television was on in the living room, emitting a dull, slightly static drone, and setting flickering shadows on the walls. Richie stepped towards the archway ever so slowly, his breathing so heavy he had to clasp a hand over his mouth. He poked his head around the wall, to see a figure sat up in the recliner, their head rolled back against the top of the chair, letting out a choked snore. He exhaled in relief and started to walk down the hallway when he felt a tap on his shoulder and nearly jumped out of his skin.

*“Richie, this is dumb, let's go,”* Eddie hissed under his breath, and Richie spun around, hands clutched to his chest.

“Jesus  *fucking*  Christ, Eds, you gave me a heart attack,” he closed his eyes and tried to even out his breathing for a moment. “I told you to stay in the truck.”

Eddie's eyes flicked over to the armchair and his breath hitched in his throat. Richie watched the colour fade from his face and grabbed his shoulders.

“We shouldn't be doing this Rich,” he squeaked, instinctively grasping for his inhaler- which was still in the truck, “we  *really*  shouldn't be doing this.”

“He's asleep, he's asleep, he's not gonna wake up,” Richie's voice was hushed and pleading, moving one hand to Eddie's chin and forcing him to look at him, “Eddie, go back to the truck. Please.”

Eddie shook his head, feeling Richie's hand tremble against his skin.

Richie exhaled sharply out of his nose and lead Eddie down the hallway.

The room was different to the rest of the house, in the sense that it actually felt inhabited. The walls were covered in band posters and movie posters of all sorts. The bed was pushed against the far wall, covers askew on the mattress. The wooden headboard had been carved into, presumably with a pocket knife, different names and initials and whatnot. There wasn't really much in the way of material possessions, spare an obviously well-loved acoustic guitar sat on a stand in a corner and a few photo frames and aerosol deodorant cans on the dresser. It was small and comfortable and it smelled like Richie, and Eddie found himself calming down.

Richie knelt down next to the bed and pulled out a small suitcase, sliding it towards Eddie and gesturing towards the dresser.

"Just chuck as much as you can fit in there," he said, and Eddie did as he was told, unzipping the suitcase and pulling open the top drawer, fighting an urge to fold the clothes as he threw them in. Richie laid down on his stomach and tried reaching for something under the bed, stretching one arm out with a muffled groan. He retracted his arm in a huff when he couldn't reach whatever he was looking for and proceeded to manoeuvre the top half of his body under the bed frame. Eddie had nearly cleared the top drawer and had an arrangement of clothing in and around the suitcase (Richie obviously did not care for sorting his clothes and everything was just thrown in together), when his eyes caught something much more vibrant than what Eddie had expected. He held the shirt up in front of him by the collar, stifling a laugh. It was bright orange and patterned with yellow silhouetted palm trees. He spun around, holding the shirt against his chest. Richie emerged from under the bed with an 'aha!', clutching a shoebox. His hair was all dishevelled and the smile fell from his face when he saw Eddie.

"That's not mine," he sputtered as Eddie bit back a smile.

"Sure it's not," he teased, "should I pack it anyway? Are you planning on attending a luau in the near future?"

"Shut up," Richie stood up from the floor and ripped the shirt from

his hands, rubbing the fabric between his fingers for a moment before dropping it onto the pile of clothes that had accumulated on the floor. Eddie stepped over and picked up the shoebox that Richie had pulled out.

"I'll save you the shock, it's all weed."

Eddie nearly snapped his neck when his head shot up, and Richie smirked as his face went white.

"Drugs," he choked out, leaving his mouth hanging open.

"No babe, weeds from the garden. Yes it's drugs," he walked over and took the box off Eddie, who snapped his mouth shut and pressed his lips into a line, "and cigarettes. And cash. Important shit."

Eddie went back to the suitcase, shoving everything in and zipping it shut, but not without a struggle, and Richie grabbed his guitar by the neck and they both headed to leave. They quietly snuck back towards the front door, tiptoeing past the living room where the television was still humming away. They threw everything in the back seat and climbed into the front. Richie smacked his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"Shit, forgot something," he mumbled, and hopped back out before Eddie could protest, "i'll be two seconds." He disappeared back into the house, and Eddie sat nervously, fingertips fidgeting in his lap.

Richie crept back to his room and across to his dresser. There were three photo frames, two were of him, Bev, Bill, and Stan back when they were kids, and one of just him and Bev. He smiled to himself, fingers tracing over their faces, before he picked them up in a stack.

*"You got a lot of nerve in you, boy."*

Richie felt his throat closed up instantly as he turned around. His father stood in the doorway, half-leaning against the wall, eyes glazed over and drunkenly heavy, his stare burning into Richie's skin. He was wearing jeans and a shirt that may have once been white but definitely wasn't anymore, and he was all skin and bones under his

clothes. His face was hollow and sunken and creased, planted with a permanent sneer displaying crooked yellowing teeth, and his hair was dark and thin, what was still there, that is.

“Hiya Pops,” Richie forced a sickly grin, his voice course and uneven, “thought I'd drop back in to see ya.”

Wentworth Tozier took an unsteady step forward, raising one accusatory bony finger towards his son. Richie automatically shifted into a fighting stance, his hands hovering in front of him, prepared to make a move if he had to, and he could smell the rotten beer coming from the man's mouth even from across the room.

“I told you, if you leave, then you don't come back,” he slurred, his voice low and gravelly, and Richie thought he would prefer if he was shouting. Shouting was always just shouting. It was when his voice was lowered that led to-

“And now you come back, and you steal from me,” Richie felt himself shrinking with every word, despite being taller than his father, he felt like he was about to be crushed, “and you think I won't notice.”

He took another unbalanced step forward and Richie's eyes went to the doorway, mentally planning out his route so he could make a run for it. The stench intensified as the source drew closer, and he felt that he might start gagging.

“You know I'd love to stay, dad, but I should probably get going now,” he tried to joke but his mouth was uncomfortably dry and it came out as a ragged whisper.

“Don't be a *fucking* smartass, Rich,” he raised a calloused hand above his head and Richie flinched, lifting his arms up to cover his face, still clutching the photo frames so hard that they were making indents in his palms. Wentworth grinned and snickered. “Fucking coward. Always have been.”

Richie took the opportunity to escape, using all the strength he could to shove past, and bolted to the front door. He practically leapt off the porch, struggling to keep his footing, and stumbled hurriedly to the truck, not looking back until he had his hand on the driver side



door handle. He expected his father to appear in the threshold, fuming and shooting daggers with his eyes.

But he didn't.

The house remained completely void of movement, and he stood, nearly panting, the lenses of his glasses fogging up due to tears he wasn't aware he was crying.

Eddie watched from the passenger seat, not knowing what to do, not knowing what to say, or if he should say anything at all. He chose to stay quiet.

Richie stared into the house, waiting, just waiting for *something*. He stood there, trembling but otherwise frozen, for what felt like hours.

Richie Tozier had made it one week without having a breakdown.

"FUCK YOU," he shouted, his voice cracked and dry and strained and *terrified*, "FUCK. YOU."

He collapsed on the pavement, his legs simply too weak to hold him up any longer. He dropped the frames on the ground and flung his glasses off his face, sobbing and wailing into his hands, pulling his hair as he did, hard enough to shoot pain all over his scalp. Eddie got out and rushed over to the sidewalk, and Richie grabbed onto his shirt as soon as he knelt down close enough, pulling him forward and burying his face in Eddie's chest. Eddie wrapped his arms tight around his shoulders, stroking Richie's hair, feeling the sobs wracking through his body, keeping his eyes glued on the doorway.

"*I'm so fucking sorry*," Richie whimpered through a shuddered breath, "I shouldn't have brought you here, I shouldn't have- FUCK-I-

"Shh, you're okay, babe, it's okay," tears were brimming in his own eyes and he felt utterly useless.

"I'm a *fuckup*," Eddie can feel Richie's tears soaking through his shirt and onto his skin, "I'm so stupid, fuck. I'm so fucking sorry."

Eddie didn't say anything, just pressed his face into the top of Richie's head and pulled him tighter.

Richie eventually released his death grip on Eddie's shirt collar, and picked himself up. Eddie went to get his glasses, which had landed about three feet away, and the photo frames, while Richie achingly dragged himself up into the drivers seat.

"Do you want me to drive for a while?" Eddie asked before he could close the door.

"You can drive?" Richie wiped his nose with his sleeve, eyes still red and puffy, "You've just been using me as a taxi service all this time, huh? Not cool babe," he jokes, and flashes a crooked smile.

"Do you want me to or not?" Eddie laughs, and Richie nods before hopping out and moving to the passenger side.

Eddie had to readjust the seat and mirrors and it took a few tries before the engine started but soon they were on the road again.